



Colloquium on Ethical Public Art in Canada / Colloque Un Art public éthique
l'Université de Montréal / Concordia University * August 24–27, 2022

Gordon Brent Brochu-Ingram BFA, MSc, PhD

Organic Projects For Multiple Crises:

The shifting aesthetics, publics and ethics of
outdoor art works with living material and
cultivation initiated by Indigenous artists

Département d'histoire de l'art
et d'études cinématographiques
Faculté des arts et des sciences

Université 
de Montréal
et du monde.



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Un art public éthique :
perspectives
canadiennes
Ethical Public
Art in Canada



Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Canada 



FIRST PEOPLES'

CULTURAL COUNCIL

Arts Program



Conseil des arts
du Canada

Canada Council
for the Arts



Stolen Land
of Canada

Terre Volée
du Canada

Stolen

Stolen Land	Stolen Water	Stolen Resource
Stolen Kids	Stolen Living	Stolen Home
Stolen Sisters	Stolen Family	Stolen Memory
Stolen Spirit	Stolen History	Stolen Voice
Stolen Story	Stolen Past	Stolen Truth

@saraInfox

It's good to be on the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka as well as a meeting place for the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, Huron/Wendat, Abenaki, and Anishinaabeg.



chokecherry, *Prunus virginiana*, a crucial fruit tree for Indigenous communities in the northern half of North America and native to every province and territory in Canada



1.

Introduction:

**Living materials & ecosystems
as part of public art works during
times of Indigenous resurgence and
ecological crises**

plants in/as public art ?/?!/





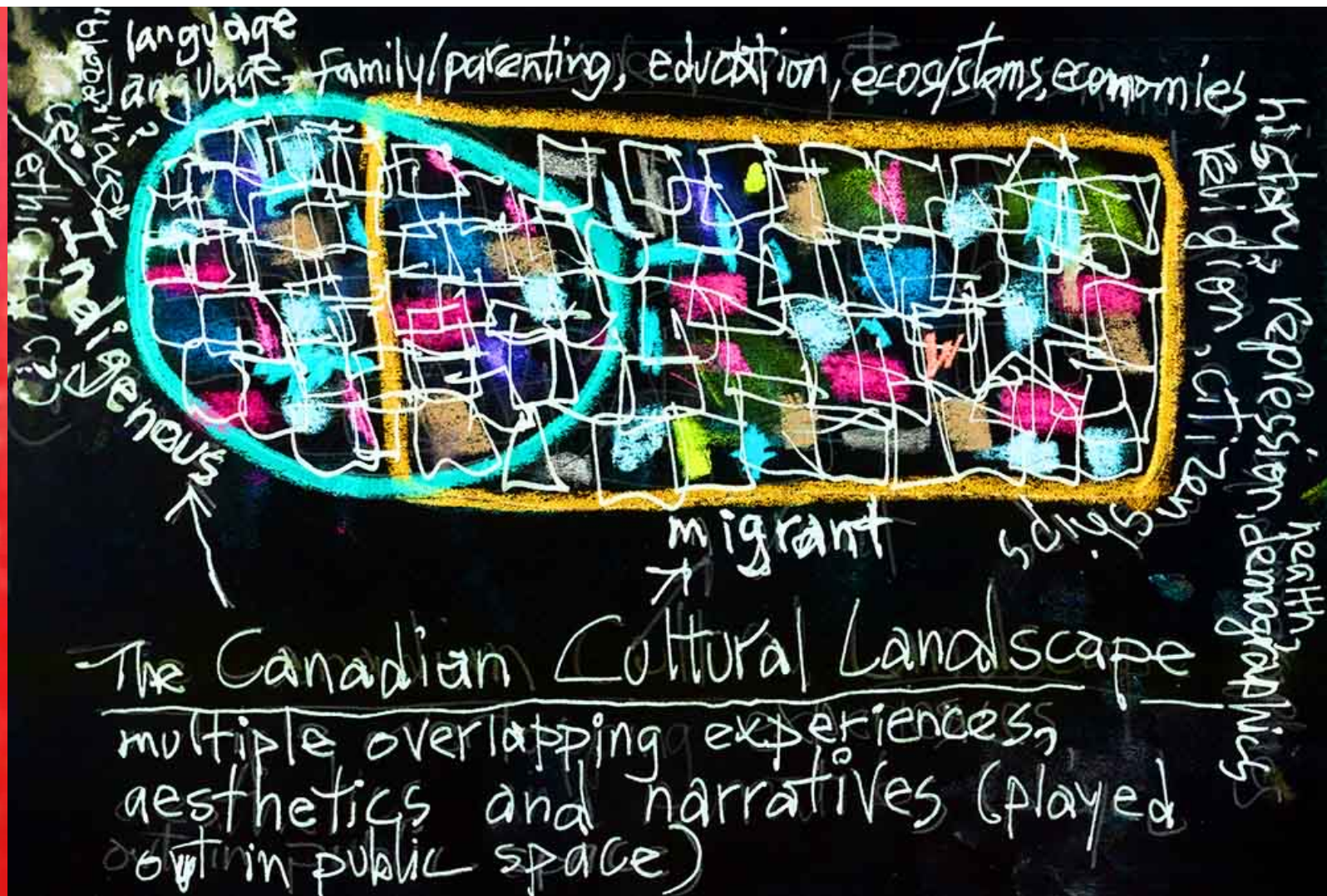
Argument 1.

Public art is a particularly effective venue for transmitting deeper knowledge and experiences around both Indigenous cultural recovery AND growing threats to the planet (and our communities) from carbon pollution, climate change, and loss of biological diversity including some of the parts of vulnerable ecosystems illustrated in particular site-based works – as well as solutions involving new practices.



Argument 2.

All public art certainly in the Western Hemisphere and further afield, has a relationship to experiences of Indigeneity whether or not there are legal obligations to consult and collaborate with First Nations.





2.

Problem statement:

**Making (and growing!) organic
public art projects parts of the
fabric of communities**

After Auspicious Beginnings, Public Art Finds Itself at Odds With the Public

By WILLIAM E. SCHMIDT
Special to The New York Times

ST. LOUIS, Oct. 28 — It was intended, in the words of the Manhattan artist who created it, as a kind of civic monument to St. Louis's natural history: a dense clump of native Missouri trees, planted atop a shaped mound of earth and surrounded by a formal French garden — all of this on a wedge-shaped city block near downtown.

Now, barely 17 months after its dedication by city officials, Alan Sonfist's "Time Landscape of St. Louis" is an empty lot. It was leveled two weeks ago by city bulldozers after the new head of the city Parks Department declared St. Louis's first example of "environmental sculpture" a public eyesore.

The decision to destroy a publicly financed civic art work has provoked indignation among art patrons here and angry threats of a lawsuit by Mr. Sonfist. It has added fuel to a growing national debate over who owns and controls the disposition of the works of art that have proliferated in the nation's squares, parks and plazas over the past 15 years.

3 Provoke Strong Reactions

Many of the works have aroused sharply negative public reaction, including the sculpture "Tilted Arc" in New York City. The artist, Richard Serra, recently lost a bid in Federal court to block removal of the six-year-old work, which is in the plaza in front of the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building in lower Manhattan.

In Tacoma, Wash., an abstract neon piece installed in the city's sports and convention center brought such public indignation that in 1985 the voters repealed an ordinance setting aside 1 percent of the city's construction budgets for public art commissions.

And in Edwardsville, Ill., 16 miles northeast of St. Louis, the City Council last week voted to hire an artist to repaint the figure of a black man in a 22-year-old mural on the facade of City Hall. Black groups said depicting the man as a freed slave was offensive.

The city will repaint him as a farmer. At stake in all of these disputes is the conflict between the rights of the artist who created the piece and the rights of the public, which commissioned the piece and for whose benefit, presumably, it was done.



Evelyn O. Rice, new head of the Parks Department in St. Louis, at the park where Alan Sonfist's environmental sculpture "Time Landscape of St. Louis" was destroyed. The park is being re-landscaped. At right is Richard Serra's "Twain," a sculpture in downtown St. Louis consisting of eight steel slabs.

Richard Andrews, the director of the Visual Arts Program for the National Endowment for the Arts, said such disputes "represent a whole new legal arena for the arts." As art has moved out of the museum and gallery into public places, he said, it has become prey to the all the other social, economic, political and cultural forces that affect the rest of the changing urban landscape.

As a result of meetings over the last year, the National Endowment will publish a handbook next month intended to help both artists and communities come up with a model process for dealing with disputes over public art. The guidelines will help public officials and artists in drawing up careful contracts and provide a review process for the placement and removal of works of art.

But Barbara Hoffman, a lawyer in New York for Mr. Sonfist and an authority on public art law, says what happened in St. Louis is different from other disputes because Mr. Sonfist never had an opportunity to defend his work or speak against its removal.

"What shocked me is that this is the only situation I have heard of in which some bureaucrat felt empowered, without reliance on any kind of procedure, guidance or hearing, to simply go out and unilaterally destroy a work of art," said Ms. Hoffman, who has

served as the head of the public art subcommittee of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York.

Evelyn O. Rice, new director of the city's Department of Parks, Recreation and Forestry, said in an interview here that Mr. Sonfist's piece was "a good idea that had gone bad."

"It looked like a construction site," she said, noting that she had received several complaints about it. "There were weeds there, homeless people were hanging their clothes from trees. It was as if the artist had abandoned the site, leaving it to me to use my budget and my workers to try to make it work."

Although Miss Rice said she did not



establishing a panel to review a work before it is removed.

"I didn't want people making promises just to force further delays," she said. "They could tie up the site for two or three years."

The site, across the street and a block west of St. Louis Union Station, has now been cleared of the native trees and wildflowers that were intended, in Mr. Sonfist's words, as a "poetic metaphor" to the native Missouri forest.

The shaped mound on which they were planted, symbolic of the city's Indian heritage, has been leveled, and the shrubbery, gravel border and cobblestones that were based on a Versailles garden and meant to represent the city's French founders have been removed.

In place of all this, the city has put down sod and is now planting a row of trees. Miss Rice said she planned to install park benches to make the block "user friendly."

Artist Vents Outrage

Mr. Sonfist says he is outraged and flabbergasted by Miss Rice's action. "How can such a capricious destruction to a public work of art, funded with public monies, be condoned?" he asked. "In a society which values free expression, art has a right to exist. I cannot silently stand by in the presence of such a violation."

Despite the outrage of Mr. Sonfist and some others, the destruction of the landscape seems to stirred only ripples of anger in St. Louis, a city which has a long and rich history of public art commissions, ranging from Eero Saarinen's magnificent Gateway Arch, which looms over the Mississippi River, to Mr. Serra's "Twain," eight steel slabs that enclose a landscaped block between the arch and Mr. Sonfist's ill-fated work.

But Mr. Sonfist's outrage over what happened to his "Time Landscape" has been shared by some of city's most influential art patrons, including Emily Pulitzer, whose husband, Joseph Pulitzer Jr., is chairman of The St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

"The bureaucrats in the city Parks Department sabotaged it from the beginning, because they didn't want to do the extra work that it required," said Mrs. Pulitzer.

know how much the work cost to install and maintain, Mr. Sonfist says he estimates that about \$100,000 was spent on the project, including buying trees and various supplies, and using city laborers. The work was commissioned in 1984 and dedicated in May 1986.

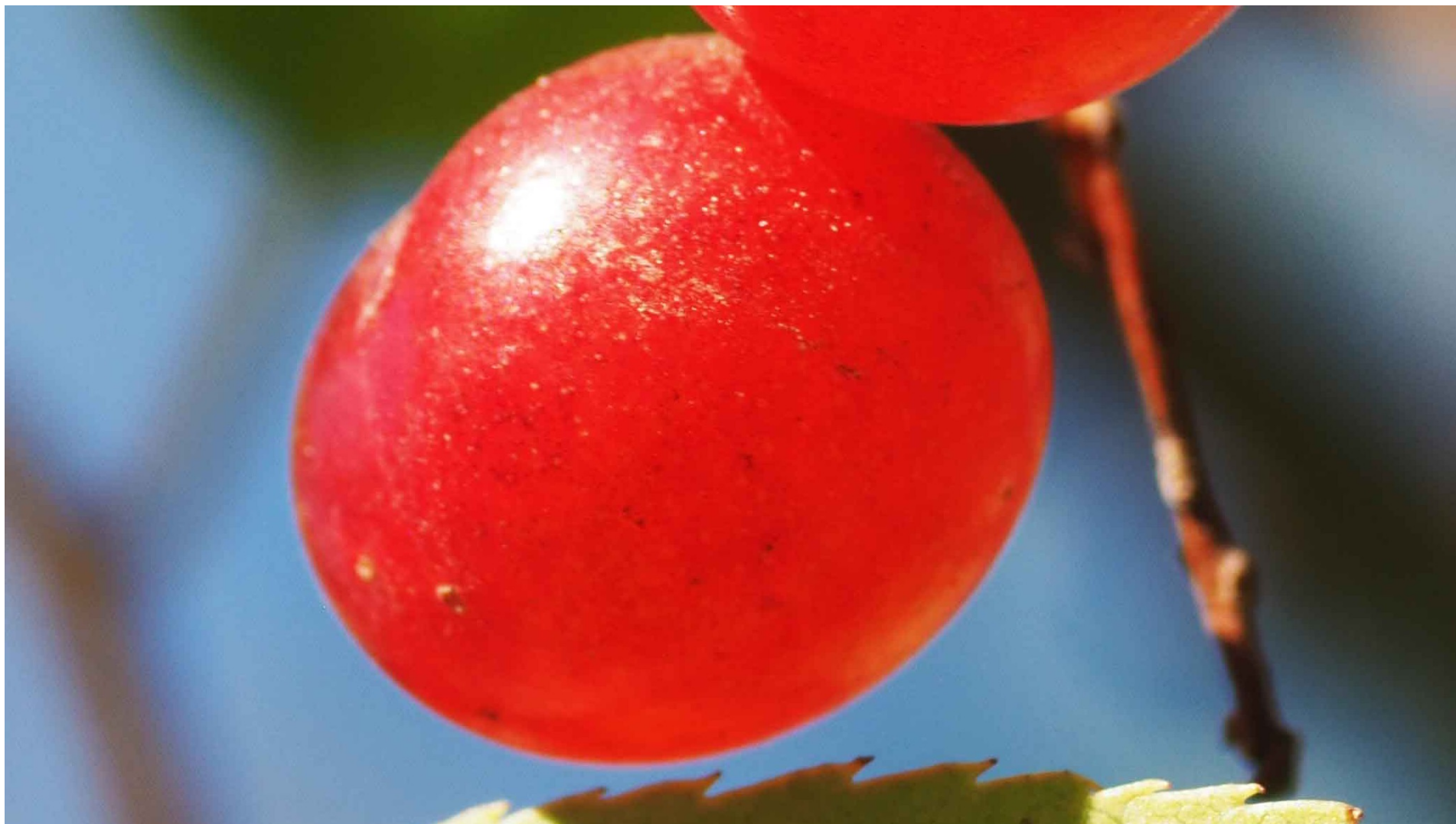
After reviewing the file on the park, Miss Rice said she informed the city's Regional Arts Commission that she was "taking it out." After hearing no protests, she said she ordered city bulldozers to begin clearing the site on Oct. 13.

Miss Rice said she did not use the city's public arts policy, adopted last December, because, she said, it was "problematic." The policy calls for es-



The New York Times/Bill Stover

Evelyn O. Rice, new head of the Parks Department in St. Louis, at the park where Alan Sonfist's environmental sculpture "Time Landscape of St. Louis" was destroyed. The park is being re-landscaped. At right is Richard Serra's "Twain," a sculpture in down-





3.

**The multiplying publics of public art in
Canada:**

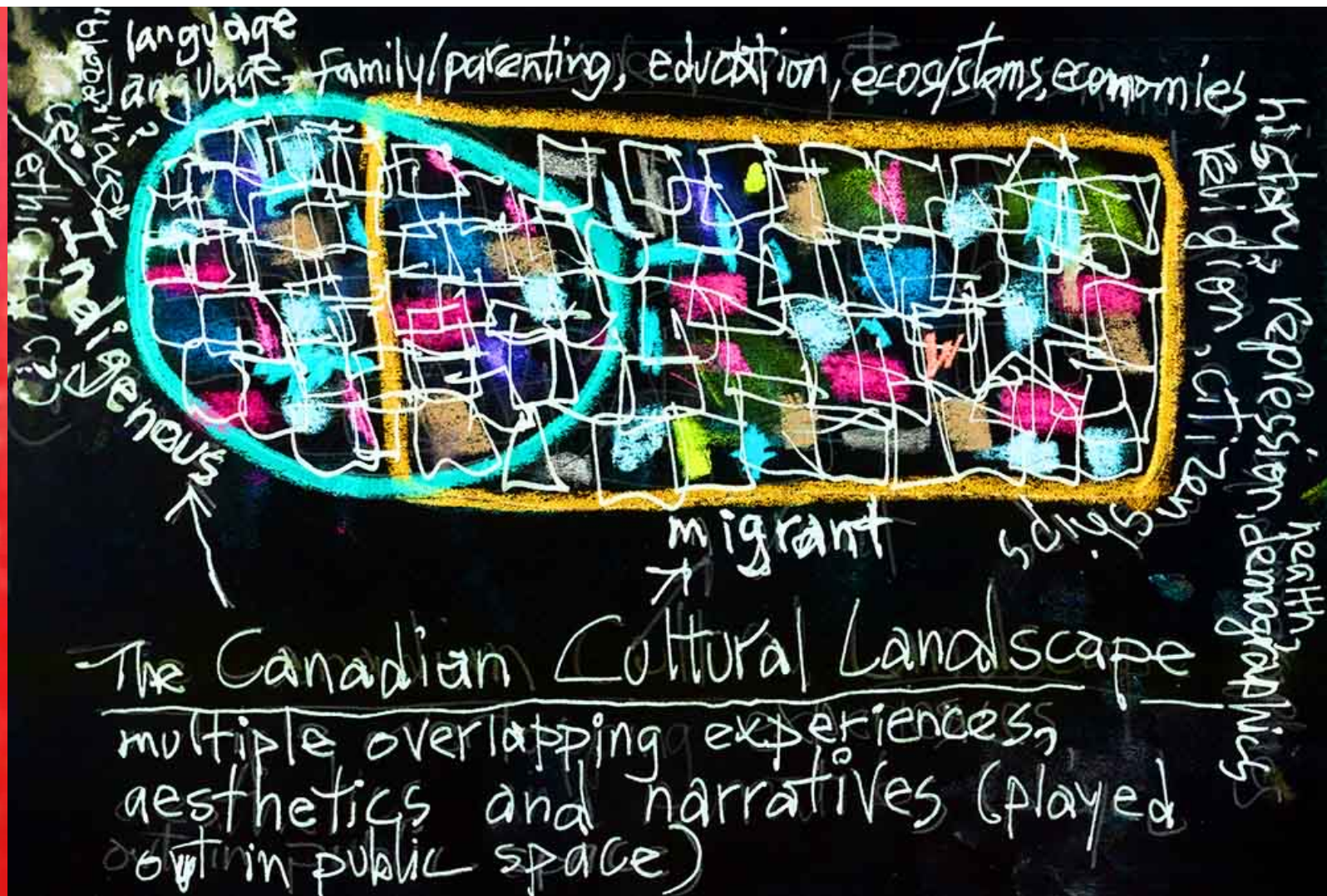
**Multiple crises, intensifying needs &
numerous opportunities**

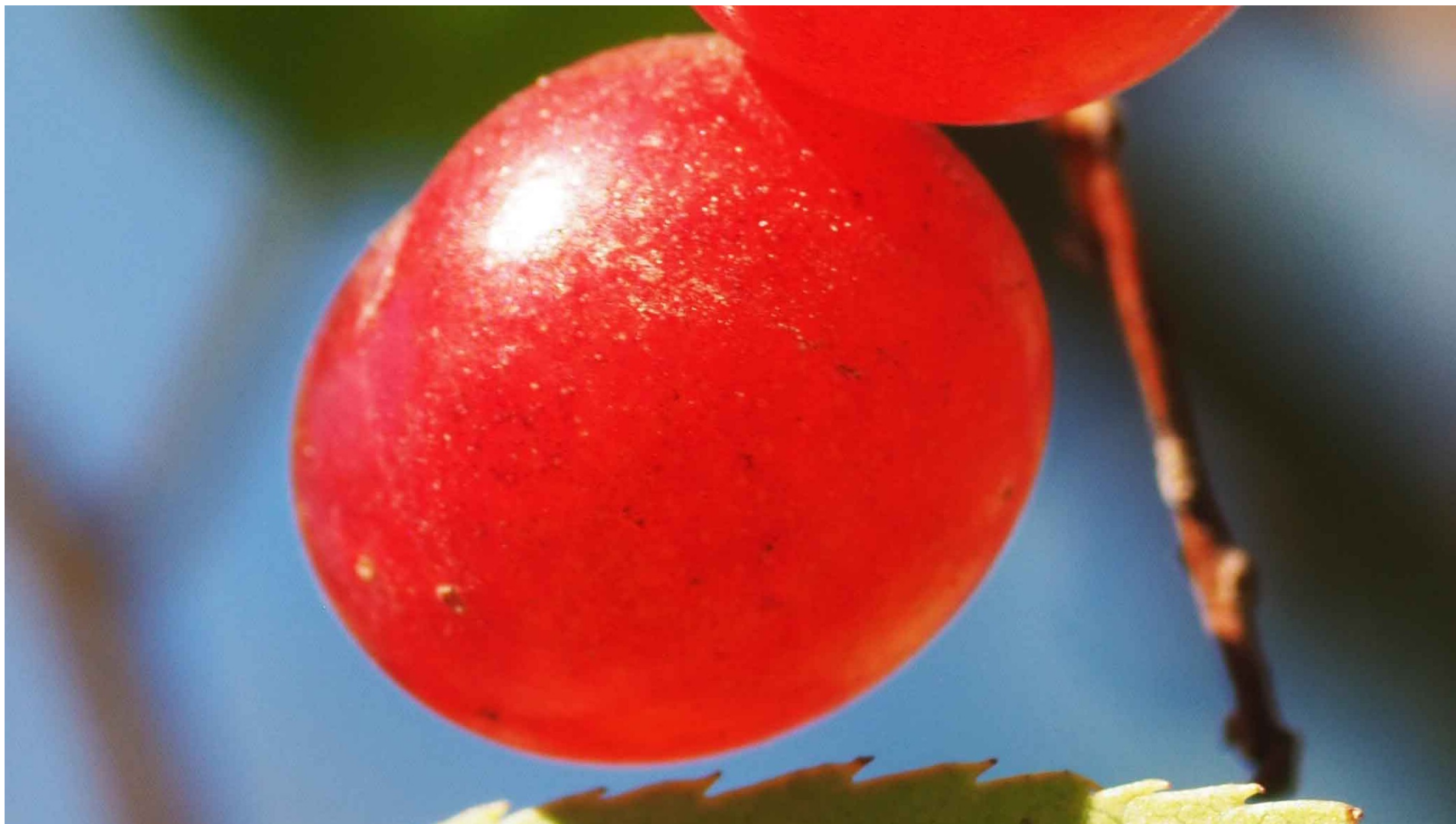


Alert Bay,
British Columbia
circa 1900
a decade and a
half into the
1885 – 1951
Canada's
federal ban
against
potlatch
ceremonies



Ellen Neel (1916-1966)
Kwakwaka'wakw
carver &
activist (especially
against
Indian Schools and
as a pioneer
in early Indian /
Aboriginal
media)







3.

**Cultivation as contemporary art
practices since Land art**



Still Life with Fruit on a Stone Ledge circa 1603
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610)



left: DALL·E: Medieval painter growing plants for making their paints
right: DALL·E: Indigenous painter growing plants for making their paints

DALL·E
flowering
fruit trees
with humans
loving them









Alan Sonfist, "Myself Becoming One with the Tree," 1969

Joseph Beuys, 1982, "7000 Oaks", 1982–1987,
Kassel, Germany

7000 EICHEN IN KASSEL



JOSEPH BEUYS - 7000 EICHEN
BEGINN DER AKTION: DOKUMENTA VII, 1982

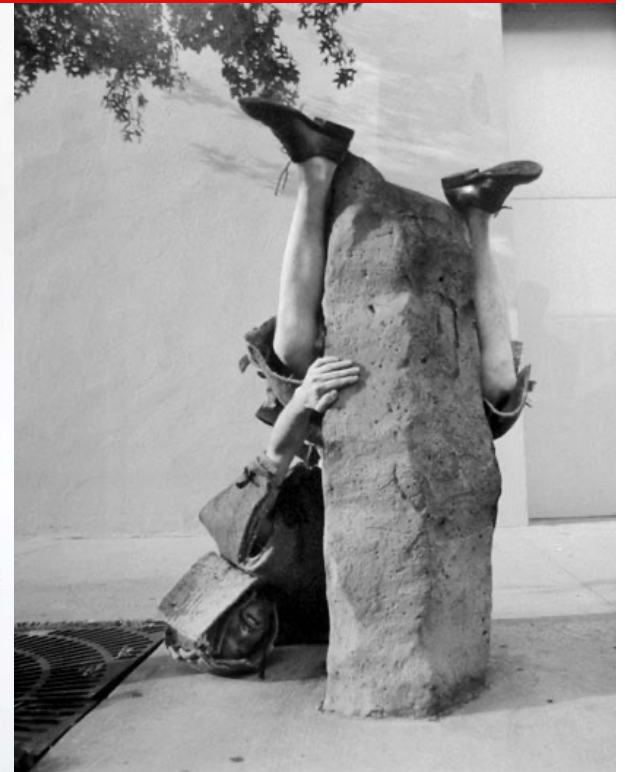
Von hier aus

MITWIRKEN DURCH EINE BAUMSPENDE

1 BAUM (+ 1 STEIN) KOSTET 500 DM

BAUMSPENDEN an:
Magistrat der Stadt Kassel
Stadtparkkasse Kassel
BLZ 520 501 51 - Kto.-Nr. 011 008
Verwendungszweck (ohne eingetragene):
VW 220 „Joseph Beuys 7000 Eichen“

JEDER SPENDER ERHÄLT EIN VON JOSEPH BEUYS
SIGNIERTES ZERTIFIKAT UND EINE
STEUERABZUGSFÄHIGE SPENDENBESCHEINIGUNG





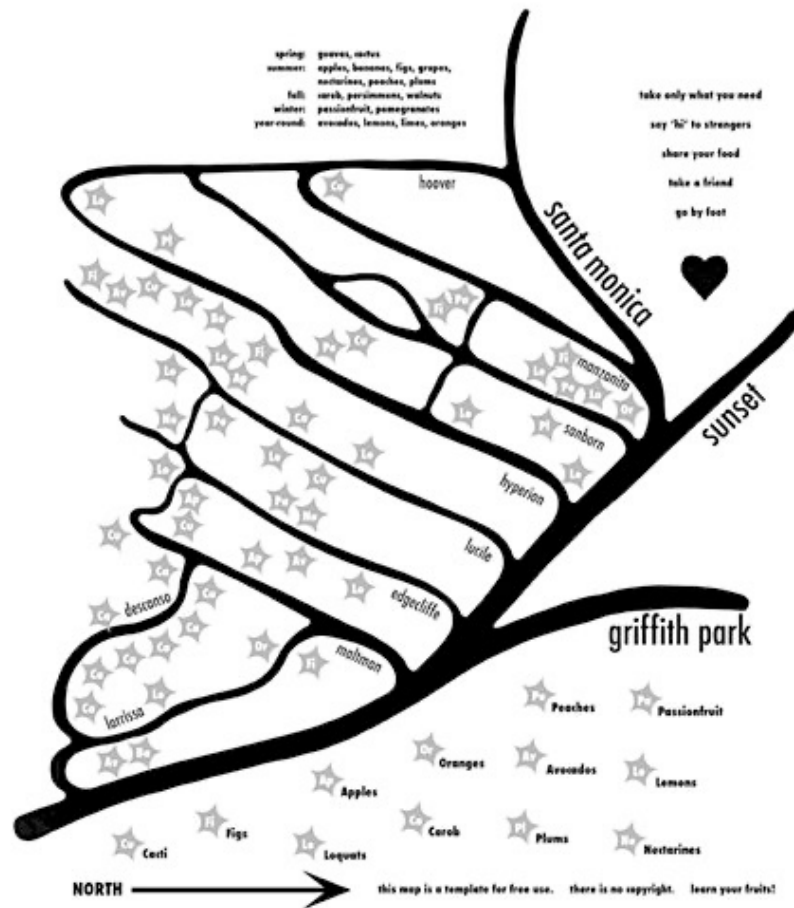
Mel Chin, Revival Field, 1991-ongoing, plants,
industrial fencing on a hazardous waste landfill



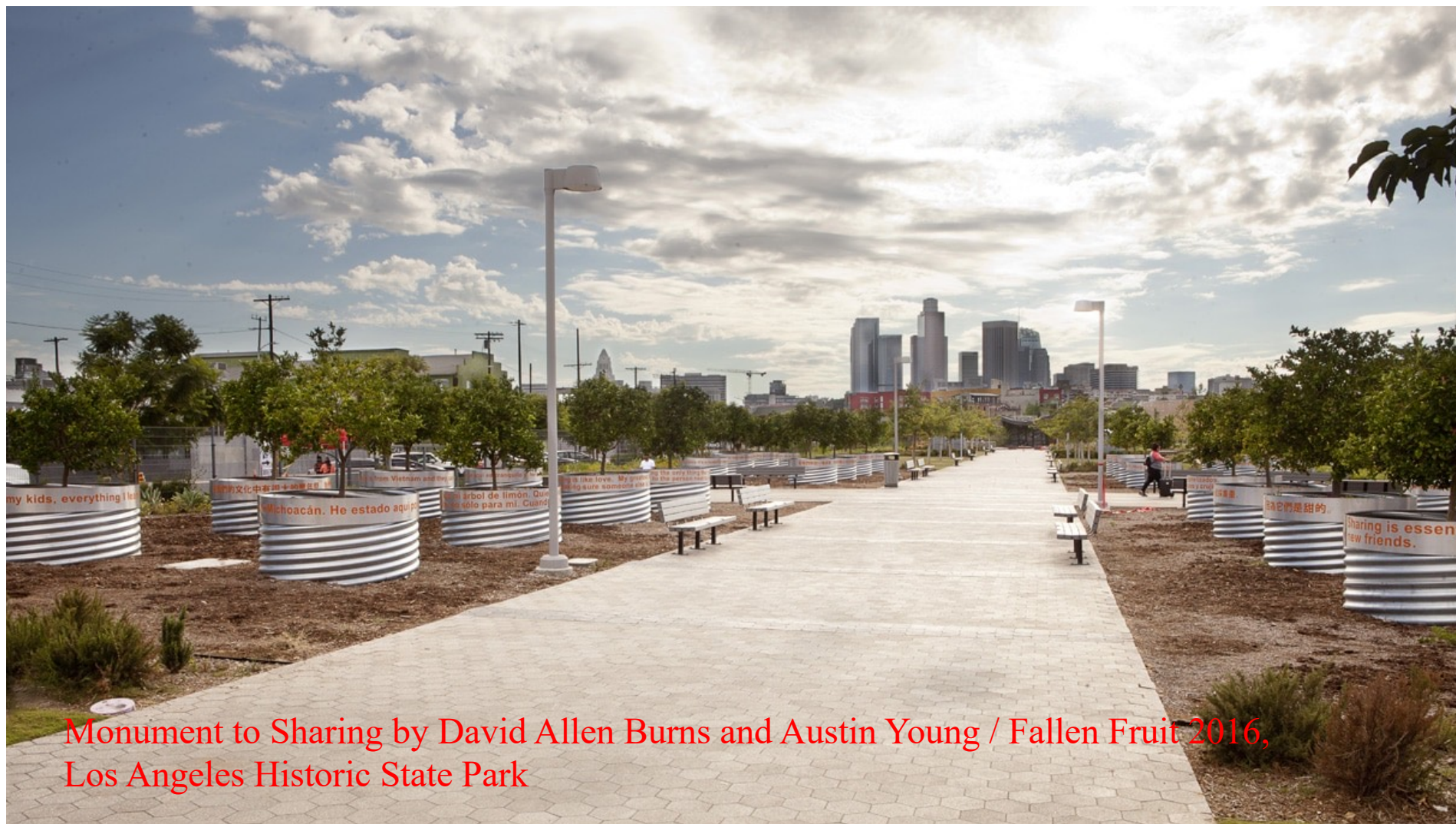
2018 May 26 Oliver Kellhammer in one of his three public art works in East Vancouver: Means of Production Garden (initially installed in 2002) P5260117

spring: guavas, nectarines
 summer: apples, bananas, figs, grapes, nectarines, peaches, plums
 fall: peach, persimmon, walnuts
 winter: passionfruit, pomegranates
 year-round: avocados, lemons, limes, oranges

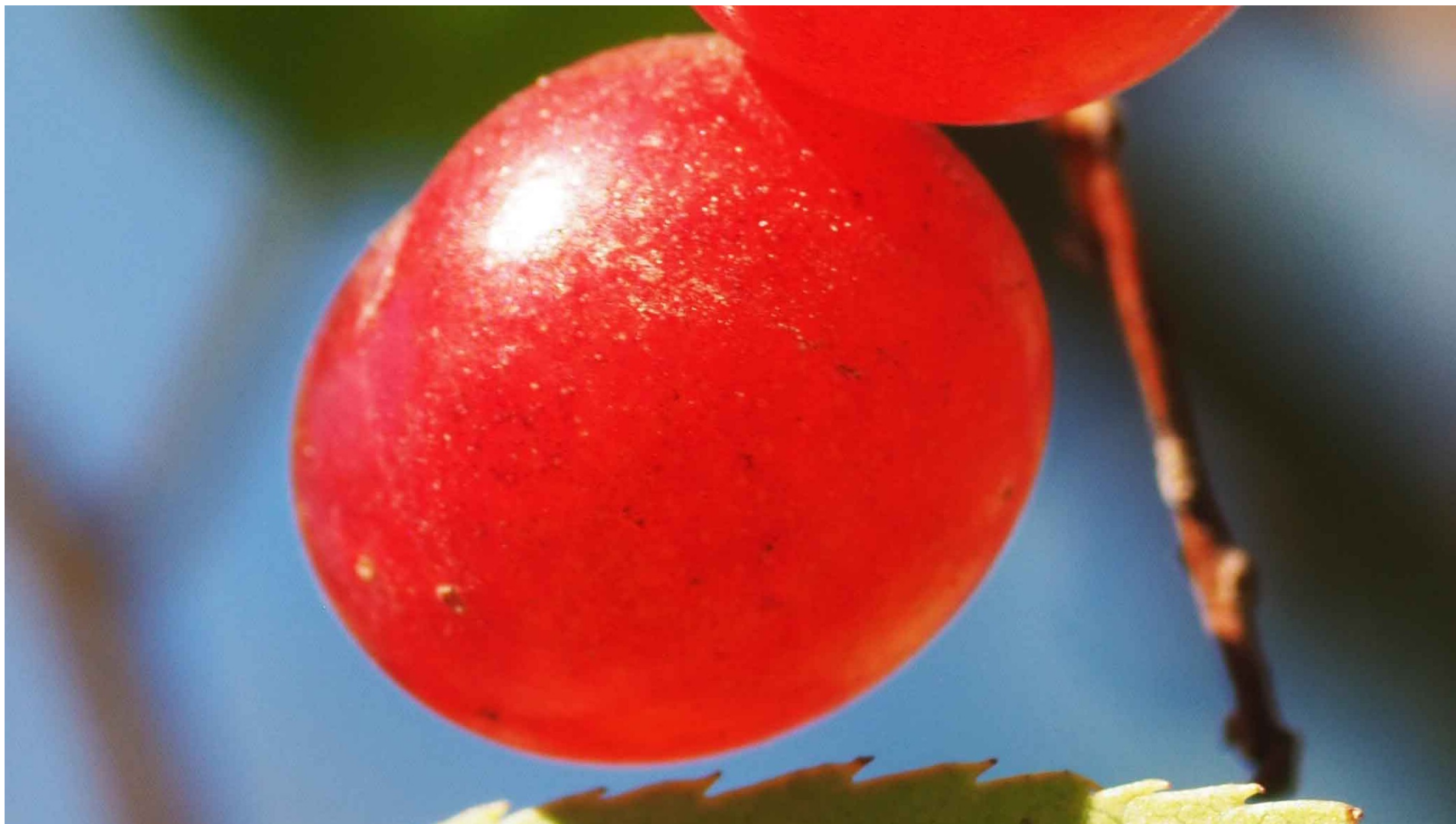
take only what you need
 say "hi" to strangers
 share your food
 take a friend
 go by foot



FALLEN FRUIT OF SILVER LAKE
 more information at <http://www.fallenfruit.org>



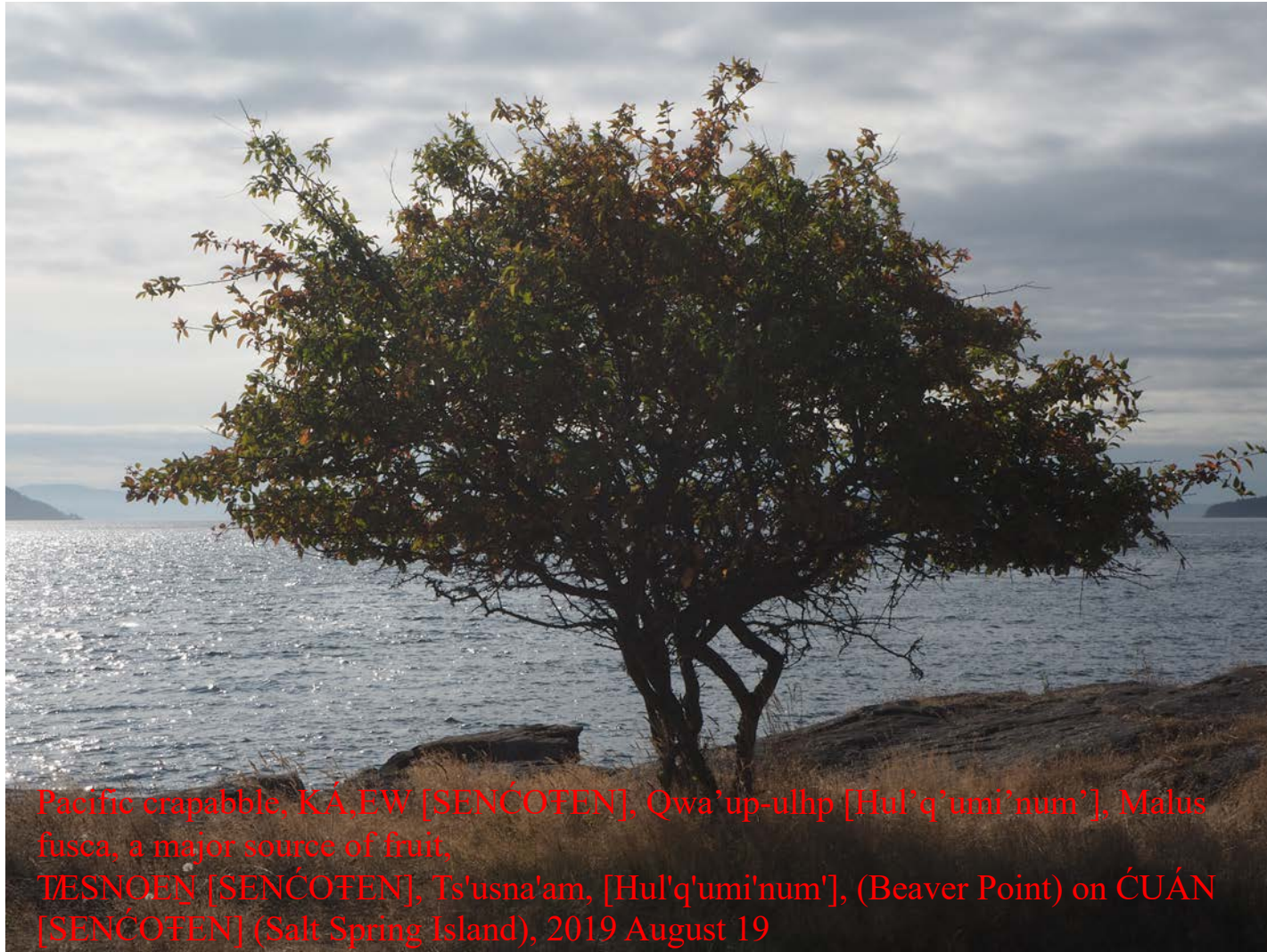
Monument to Sharing by David Allen Burns and Austin Young / Fallen Fruit 2016,
Los Angeles Historic State Park



4. Contemporary Indigenous public artists & art works with cultivation




DALL·E inspired
Indigenous artist
making public art
through planting a
fruit tree



Many
Indigenous
communities
in North
America
have long
memories of
losing
their orchards
and want to
get them
back.





Mike
Macdonald.
1997 still
from video
in
exhibition
"Digital
Garden",
MSVU Art
Gallery,
Mount
Saint
Vincent
University,
Halifax



Co-led by Anishinaabe artist, curator and educator Lisa Myers and native-bee ecologist Dr. Sheila Colla, Finding Flowers' main focus is researching, replanting and caring for the more-than-twenty Medicine and Butterfly Garden artworks created across Canada by the late Mi'kmaw/Beothuk and 2-Spirit artist Mike MacDonald.

MacDonald's gardens were originally planted, and some continue to exist, surrounded by different plant life and languages across the land we know as Canada. Distinct from colonial conceptions of gardens, MacDonald conceived his gardens as art installations, and as spaces for community contemplation and environmental reflection.



A black rectangular sign is suspended from a dark metal pole by two chains. The sign has white text that reads "Welcome to Mike MacDonald's 'Butterfly Garden'". The background is out of focus, showing a brick building on the left and green foliage on the right. The entire image is framed by a red border on the left and right sides.


*Welcome to
Mike MacDonald's
"Butterfly Garden"*





Mike Macdonald's 1999 Butterfly Garden at Banff Centre was the first piece of permanent, outdoor art within Banff National Park by an Indigenous artist since the local Nakoda, Ktunax, Secwépemc communities, who had maintained regular presences there, were evicted and banned in the late 1890s.





Duane Linklater
July 1 to September 11, 2016

gallery 2

WOOD LAND SCHOOL: THUNDERBIRD WOMAN

Faculty: Jaimie Isaac and Duane Linklater

Participants: Jamie Black, Lindsey Bond, Jackie Traverse
Stephanie Duran Castillo, Danielle Fenn, Julia Anne Leach
Kristin Flattery, Lila Fontaine, Jillian McDonald
Fallon Simard, Emilie St. Hilaire, Phoenix Thomas

July 18 to August 5, 2016

in the breezeway and elevator

Edgar Heap of Birds

July 1 to September 11, 2016

2016 Plug In ICA, Winnipeg



2017. Blueberries
for 15 Vessels.
Eli and Edyth Broad
Art Museum,
Michigan State
University,
East Lansing



Duane
Linklater. 2018.
mîkîwan.
situated in
Indigenous Art
Park ᐃᓄᓐ
(ÎNÎW) River
Lot 11ᐃ,
Edmonton,
Alberta

[illegible]

Photographs and text by Stuart Ingers

August 29, 1980 below west side of Edizia Peak, below toe of western glacier

Moving forward. This morning we hiked through the new snow. Sooted ahead of the group. Fell asleep in the snow. Followed fresh caribou tracks that were new, followed by huge wolf tracks and many other tracks. The weather was good. We heard gunshots yesterday. Fewer caribou - the Edizia heard is possibly as low as 20. I pray that the wolf feed meat - something. Modern day ecological disturbances often force us to choose between protecting one species over another. Protection of the complete set of relationships is often thought of as radical or impossible. It is radical. Totally essential, as we walked up a lateral moraine on the glacier this afternoon. The shades of white snow. Found the tracks of a caribou on the way back to camp. Five months old, bones strown. Was probably wolf.

1982 OVO
(Montréal) 46
Photography and
literature Issue.
4 pages.



'Open' Space with Martha Judge 1994 Queer Space, The Storefront Center for Art and Architecture, New York



2011 July 20
Saik'uz Language
Guardians,
Geoffrey Thomas,
Rita Thomas &
Susie Antoine,
Saik'uz
First Nation,
Stoney Creek,
British Columbia



1987 Hwmet'utsun (Cowichan acorn food oaks), Salt Spring Island 2' x 3' cibachrome

2022 April 24 When They Blossom - The chokecherry grove on Hwmet'utsun

16 minutes

<https://vimeo.com/710204375>

2021 August 24 ripe chokecherries north of Spuzzum

10 minutes

<https://vimeo.com/694244354>

Kutenai Headwaters (unceded Secwépemc, Ktunaxa, and Nakoda territory) note 2
sweat lodge in overlapping territories

2021 December 1 * 6 1/2 minutes

<https://vimeo.com/687301408>

Kutenai Headwaters (unceded Secwépemc, Ktunaxa, and Nakoda territory) note 3
Willow Weaving

2021 Dec 1 Willow Weaving in the Kutenai Headwaters* 14 minutes

<https://vimeo.com/689123281>

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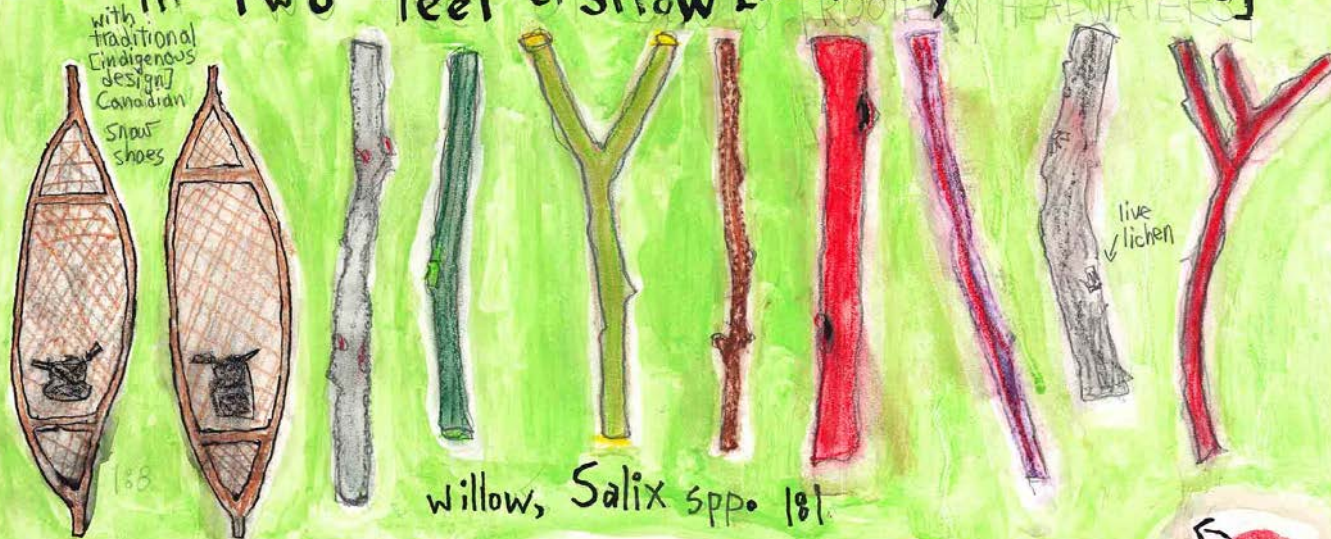
November 22-28, 2021

6/7

Ecological Engagement Through the Seasons

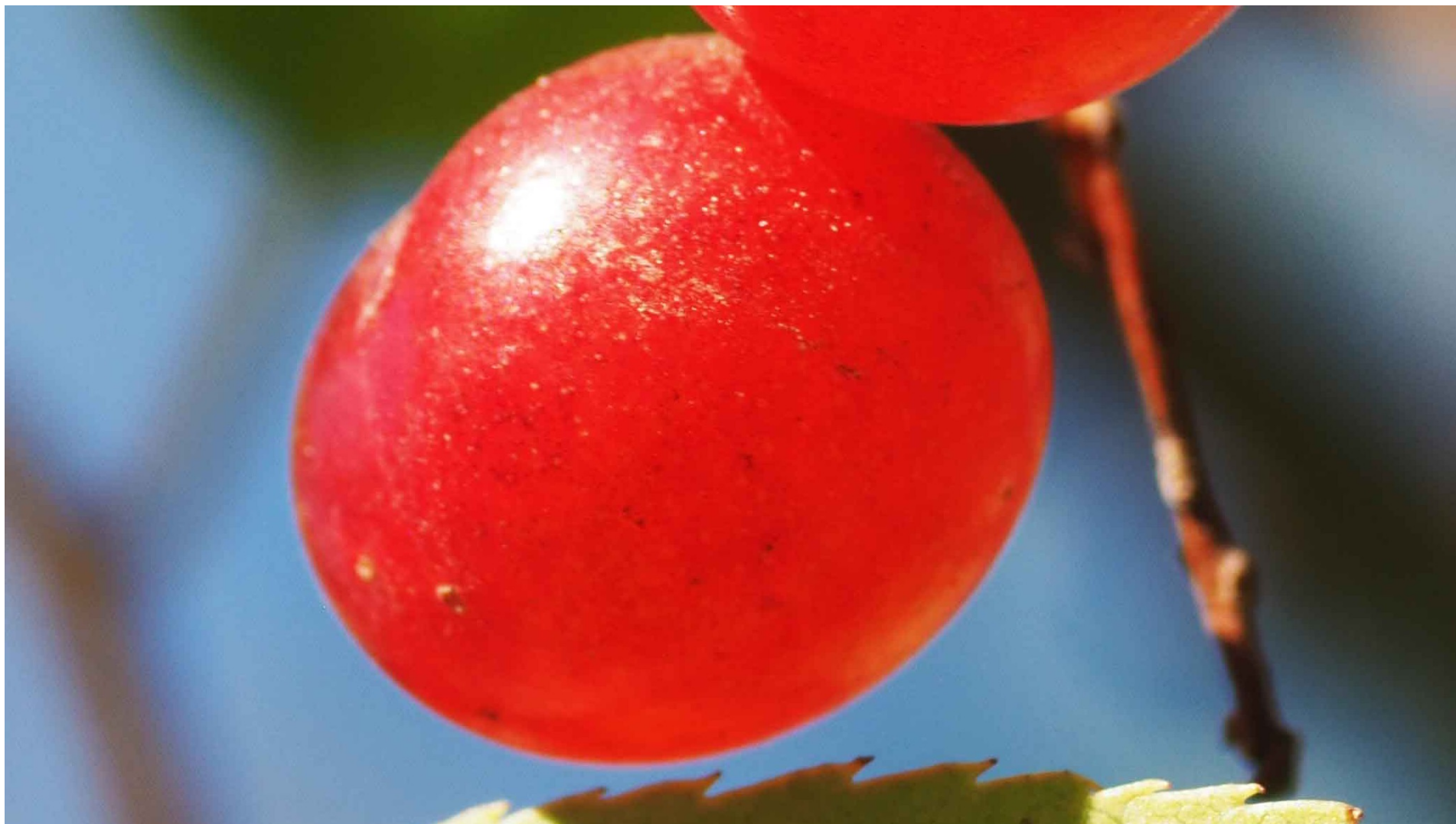
HARVESTING WILLOW

in two feet of snow [Kootenay headwaters]



sweet patches for several tongues:
ecologies of Rocky Mountain edible fruit trees with conversations between
Nakoda, Ktunaxa, Secwepemcélw, Cree, Michif, and Chinook jargon along with French and English







5.

**Putting cultivation back into
contemporary culture:**

Expanding inter-cultural dialogues

some social uses of cultivation-as-art-making

migrant

carbon pollution ---> carbon sequestration through plant cultivation especially trees

urban heat islands ---> plant native trees for shade

pollinator crises ---> plant and protect flowering plants for pollinators

declining habitat, fragmentation & loss of species ---> plant and protect native plants

food production ---> cultivate crops for human)

protect, celebrate & illustrate natural relationships and dependencies ---> reintroduce markers and ceremony

indigenous

territorial markers and stewardship ---> markers with important native plants

language ---> teach Indigenous languages and plant native plants that are symbolic and demonstrative

Indigenous food sovereignty ---> reclaim and protect traditional cultivation and gathering sites

restore degraded areas ---> reintroduce markers and ceremony rebuild communal food

production & distribution ---> reintroduce markers and ceremony into food production sites

some cultivation practices for art-making*

- digging and clearing
- planting (seeds and living plants)
- transplanting (and digging up) roots
- grafting
- pruning
- breeding
- burning
- harvesting, preparing food and sharing
- description and documentation (representation and abstraction)
- teaching, instruction, performance and ceremony

***There are parallel Indigenous North American and Eurasian practices often for the same gene pools.**



Chokecherry has been a major source of fruit and medicinal bark for indigenous peoples on the West Coast. Trees continue to be owned, stewarded and harvested by families of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Watuth First Nations within today's City of Vancouver.

This species is being studied at KCCOHN field station, a centre for conservation spanning traditional indigenous knowledge, modern science, and contemporary art — a project of artist/guardian/indigenous (Julian Goffe, Alex Orlandi and Gordon Brent Brock-Ingram).

Commissioned as part of the winter Coastal City for the 40th Anniversary of the City of Vancouver Public Art Program.

Vancouver.ca/Platformssocial



lhəxwłhéxw **chokecherry** ***Prunus virginiana***

One of the Salish names for chokecherry is lhəxwłhéxw in the haŋq̓m̓iŋəm Downriver dialect of Halkomelem language.



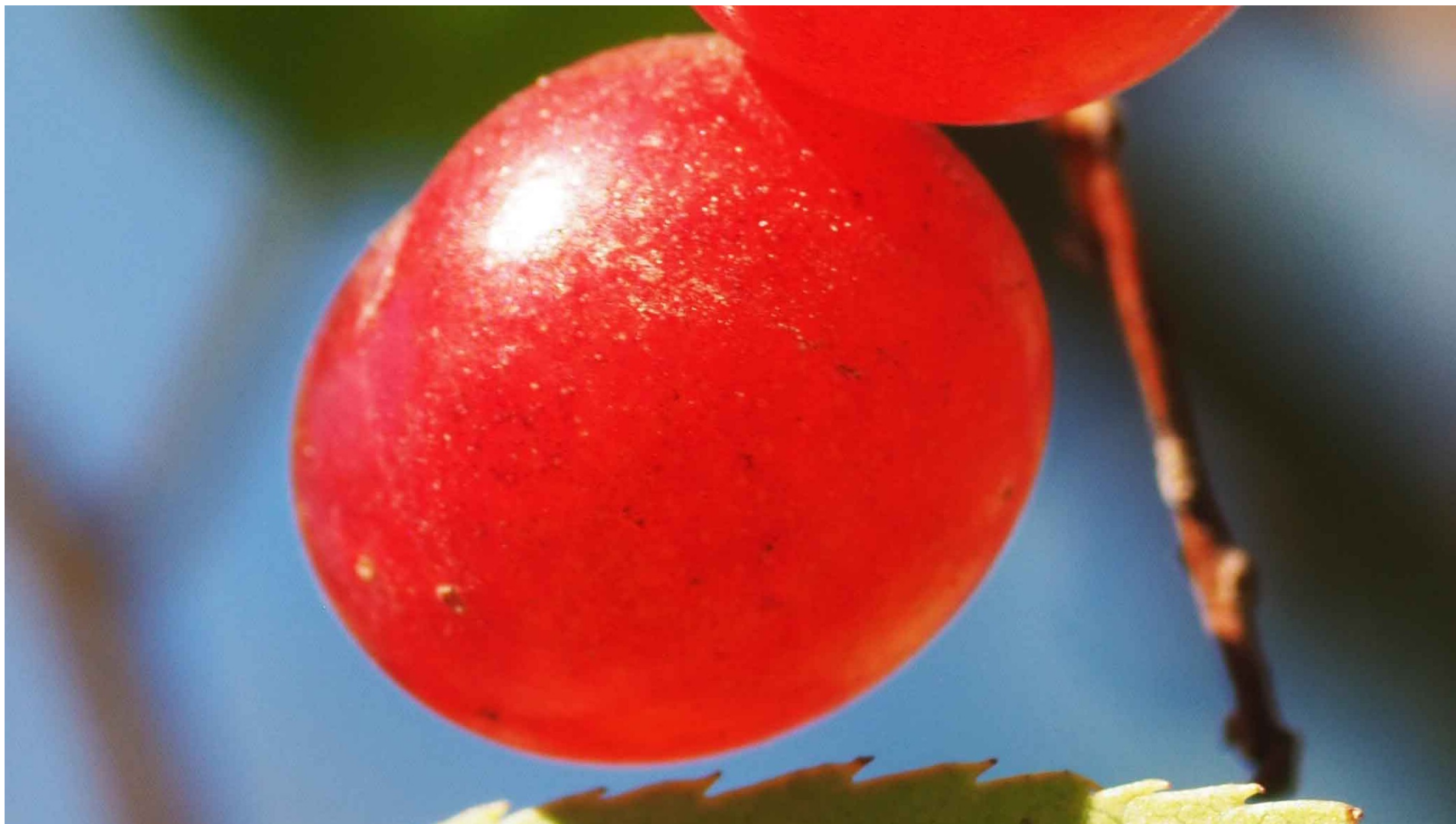
Some gentler arts of plant domestication & breeding



2022 August 14 store-bought commercial cherries [Eurasian] (left) & KEXMIN field station-bred (no laboratory interventions) chokecherries with natural hybridizing [North American]



2022 April 18 chokecherry cuttings @ KEXMIN field station-1P3A1311





6.

**Indigenous dialogues in
organic public art:**

**Some responsibilities, obligations &
laws**

1. languages: verbal, textual, visual & performative
2. working with elders when they have time
3. more time on the land (learning, and protecting);
4. native fruit trees to study, learn to propagate & plant
5. sharing more nuanced and less predictable narratives: weird, queer and weirder
6. new sites & interventions for new kinds of public art
7. teaching, mentoring and knowledge sharing
8. strengthening neighbourhood infrastructure in the face of climate change



7.

Public art with cultivation:

**Indigenous & Indigenous-acknowledging
dilemmas, solutions & best practices**

Some principles and frameworks for
resolving ethical questions around public art
with living material in areas with
Indigenous communities



principle 1

unpacking,celebrating, and nurturing a much broader spectrum of Indigenous experience (through public art)

principle 2

correctly acknowledging Indigenous territories through decolonizing collective and cognitive maps



ĆUÁN [SENĆOTEN] (Salt Spring Island) is the territory of fourteen First Nation governments nearly all of which have cultural offices that guide and collaborate with Indigenous and non-Indigenous public artists. There are two confederations, the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group and the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council, and involving the following First Nations some of whom opt out of those conferacies sometimes: **Cowichan Tribes; Halalt; Lyackson; Malahat; BOKÉĆEN (Pauquachin); Penelakut; Semiahmoo; Snuneymuxw; Stz'uminus; Tsartlip; Tsawwassen; Tsawout; Tseycum; and Ts'uubaa-asatx.** {Only one of these First Nations governments, the Tsawwassen, have signed a treat for ĆUÁN.}



principle 3

recentring public art works as inherently products of collaboration

principle 4

honouring long Indigenous memories and
acknowledging deep time and colonial crime scenes



principle 5

design each static public work as part of a dynamic
‘public’ space to foster and support a range of
performative, ceremonial, liberatory and community-
based activities



principle 6

more artist research on locales for public art works
leading to better site planning

principle 7

NOT appropriating instead engaging in more
references and homages to Indigenous artists and
traditions working through intercultural collaborations

principle 8

working with and supporting Indigenous elders

principle 9

acknowledging unresolved Indigenous territorial and other ownership issues

principle 10

protecting living public art works (and keeping commitments)



principle 11

fostering resurgence of more diverse Indigenous traditions and

principle 12

protocols to protect against appropriation of Indigenous culture and more private, communal knowledge

principle 13

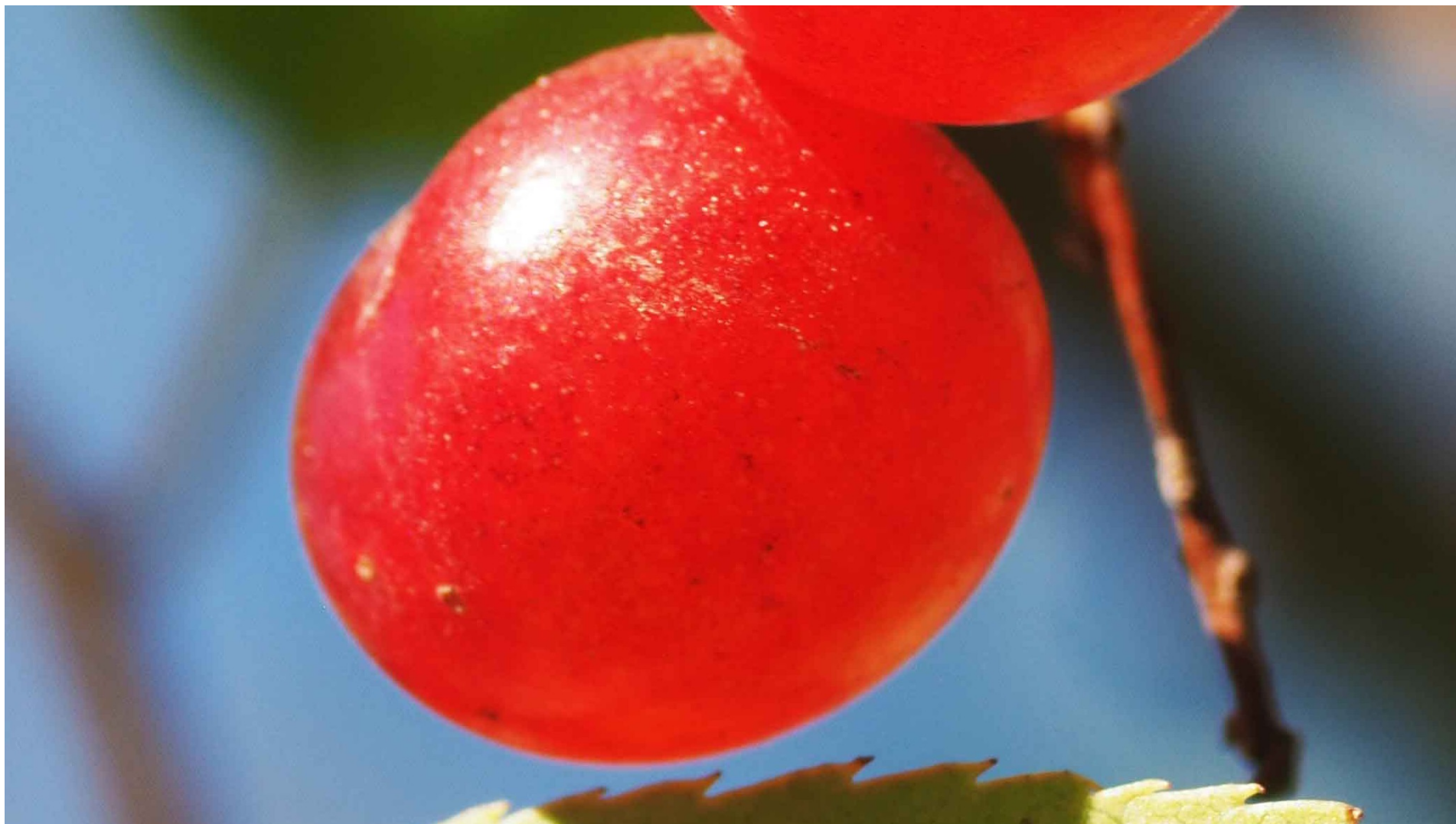
protocols to protect against tokenism and misuse of Indigenous culture, presence and consent

principle 14

protocols against greenwashing (including with Indigenous content)

principle 15

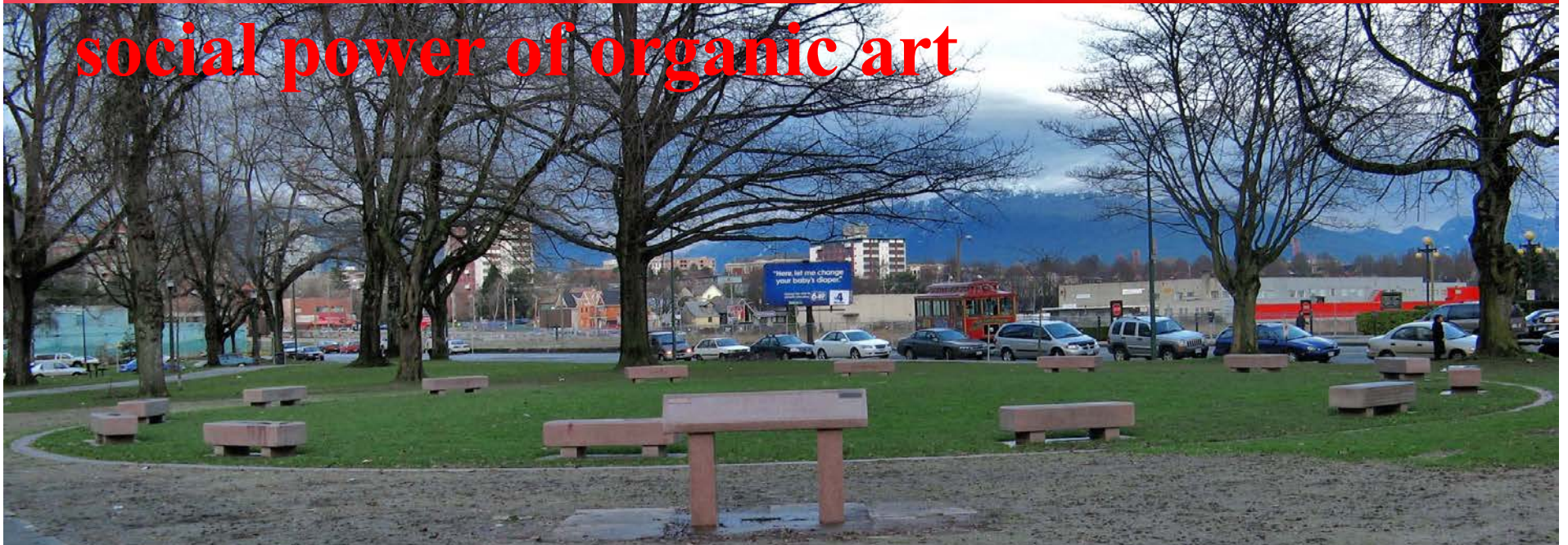
making archives of public art works with Indigenous content accessible



8.

Conclusions:

**The organic power of public art & the
social power of organic art**

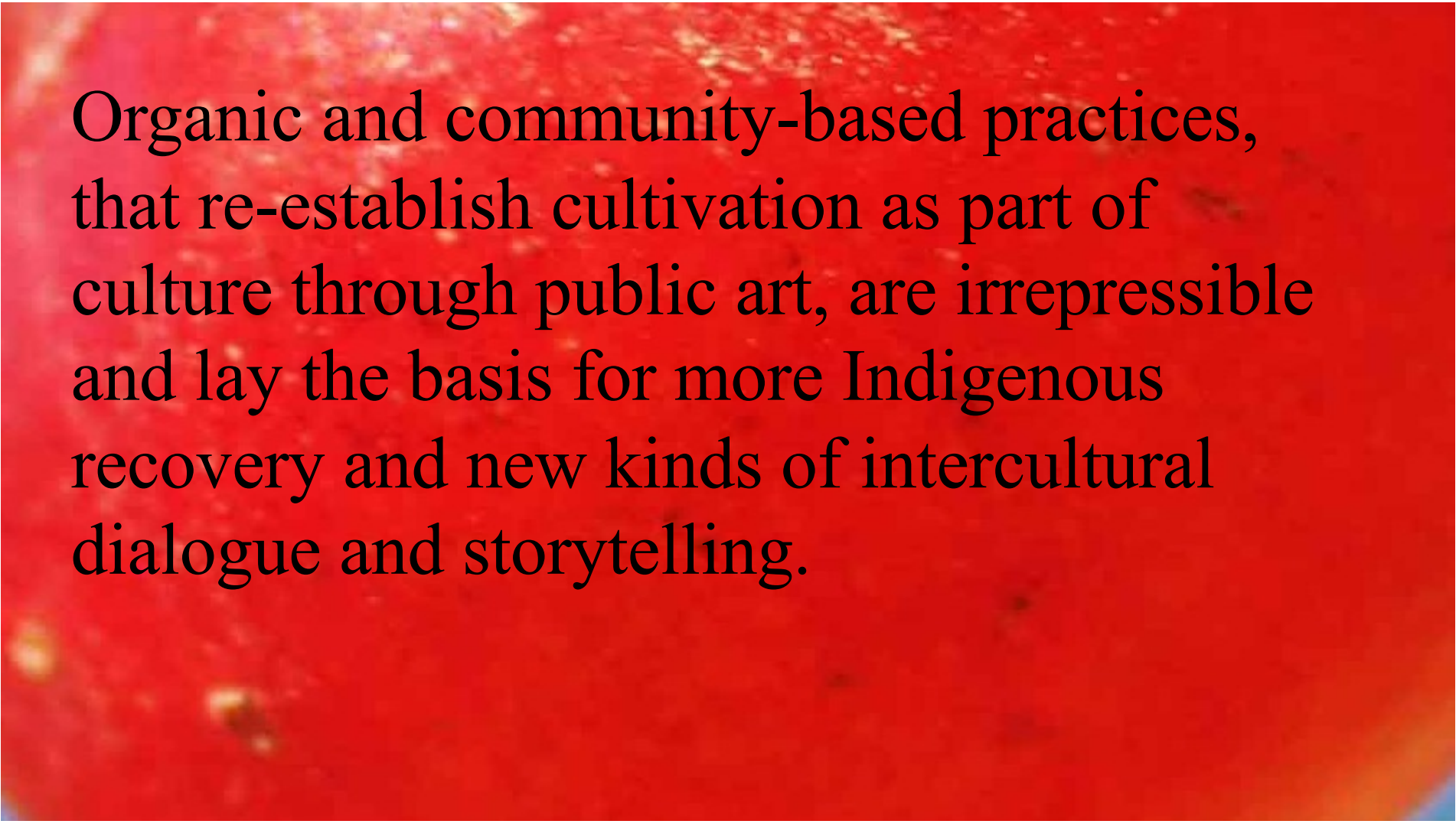




2012 December 6
National Day of
Remembrance &
Action on Violence
Against wWomen,
Marker of Change
- the Women's
Monument, central
Vancouver



In Canada, public art has often been used to re-enforce and advance certain governmentalities and their apparatuses over land – that have in turn marginalized Indigenous communities.



Organic and community-based practices, that re-establish cultivation as part of culture through public art, are irrepressible and lay the basis for more Indigenous recovery and new kinds of intercultural dialogue and storytelling.

The paper for this presentation and three background discussions were posted near the top of the following site:

www.gordonbrentingram.ca/presqueperdu

studio@gordonbrentingram.ca