



# artist talk text

*Taking excerpts from their artist talk, in this intimate conversation between Annie Wong and the artist-duo t̄iná gúyáńí (deer road), consisting of Glenna Cardinal and Seth Cardinal Dodginghorse, the artists delve into the process of making **her name**, the importance of ceremony, and the symbolism associated with the images in the film.*

**Annie:**

Can you talk about the process of making *her name*?

**seth:**

It began when my mom started her Masters [of Indigenous Social Work] at Blue Quills. This was the university that took over the Indian residential school years ago. And was the school my grandfather went to under different circumstances.

In the two years she was there, she asked me to document the different things that were going on at school, and her just being there. It wasn't to necessarily make a film. We just wanted to have home videos to show our family in the future. And *maybe* make a film.

And then it kind of ended up that we were working with Annie at the gallery [as artist-in-residence]. It was nice to be supported in figuring out what to do with this footage, and whether or not this would even become a project. There was a lot of breathing room for it to become and to not become something, and to have these memories and moments captured for our own private use.

It ended up becoming something we were comfortable sharing with others.

At the end of the film, you see my grandfather on the land that he grew up on. He took us there just before we were going to attend the search for the anomalies—which could be missing children— at Blue Quills.

This was between 2020-22. My grandfather has avoided visiting the school ever since he left when he was a teenager.

Surprisingly, he decided he wanted to come. So I ended up filming.

Being able to spend time with him returning to the land— I found that was one of my favorite [footage] I've ever shot. You can really see the joy he has being on the land.

We were also filming just before news broke out about Kamloops residential schools, and many other First Nations communities started opening up, our family especially. So the film ended up being a document of our journey.

We also really wanted to make sure that we weren't speaking for all survivors. We were finding a way to respectfully share as much or as little information as we were comfortable with.

**Annie:**

Do you want to share about the process, Glenna?

**Glenna:**

The process was really emotional. It's truly a journey within myself. I was trying to create that safe space for telling what I feel. I think the most important part, like seth said, was not speaking for other people.

It was really important to speak our truth. I remember my friend saying to me, “stand tall and speak your truth!”

So it came together with seth's wonderful vision through the lens. I'm pretty fortunate my [child] could share that through the footage and the music.

**seth:**

The audio is kind of made up of different things. This whole film is a collage. Initially, when we were putting this film together we were thinking about how much dialogue to use.

***Because there's so much to say about residential schools, our family, and about the experience, we started to pull back and cut that stuff out.***

And as we cut out more and more, we started to think about how to tell a story visually, without any words.

I used old recordings of different things I made over the past 10 years. There are a few pieces from a film score I made for another project by someone else that never got used. I think the project was about basketball— and different tracks I made for a language revitalization project. [In the film] I played with the voice to turn it into sound and noise.

So I used all these different audio pieces and it ended up fitting perfectly. Usually, I'm someone who likes doing new projects from scratch.

The final sound in the film is of my grandfather rocking out. That was something that I made for me.

**Annie:**

I like how you call this a family story as if we are watching home movies. Glenna, how did you figure out what you wanted and did not want to share?

**Glenna:**

Originally, I didn't want to speak. I wanted to leave it to seth.



It was really hard. A lot of what I said has been part of my life, part of my work, and it was to give the viewers an understanding of who I am, where I come from and how I am connected to Blue Quills.

I had to take direction from seth. At times I would have exactly 45 seconds to say something. So we were working on a fine scale. We wrote them out and worked together on a timed schedule.

Yeah, it was a huge process. seth is able to get a lot of it out of me, and he's really honest in guiding me.

**seth:**

There was a lot of brainstorming. At one point I wanted to see if we could get my grandfather to narrate.

I'm behind the camera so it's from my perspective. And my little brother's perspective sometimes.

So I thought, "[Glenna] should speak". And she was pretty hesitant at first.

I love the way my mom is a storyteller. I grew up listening to her always telling me stories.

**Annie:**

Can you tell us the story behind the sticks?

**seth:**

Yea. It comes from our culture and whether or not people understand its meaning— we're okay with people not knowing. We don't have to explain everything.

But I can explain it now. In Plains culture and warfare, this would include Tsuut'ina and Blackfoot culture— If you've ever been to a powwow, you'll see the dancers with a stick. Some of them are pretty decorative nowadays. It symbolizes the stick used in war before colonization. In Western warfare, the most honorable thing one could do is to kill your enemy. That's how people are celebrated. But in Plains culture, instead of killing your enemy, the more honorable thing to do was to touch them with the "coupe"—the stick is called a coup— and get away without being touched yourself or harmed in any way. It symbolizes being untouchable.

It's called "counting coupe." That was more honorable and celebrated in your community. It was a way to humiliate and take power from the other person.

**Annie:**

It's a powerful gesture that comes up in the film, I think three times.

And I agree, even if you don't know the symbolism, the action used against these large institutional buildings is a powerful gesture.

**seth:**

Thank you for asking the question.

**Annie:**

Have you had the chance to share this with your family?

**Glenna:**

We're going to have some time in December. I'm hoping. We'll have to find a venue big enough.

My dad was telling my sister about the film and he said, "Oh, yeah, it was really good. It's all about me." Haha.

**seth:**

Yeah, I was worried about making him feel uncomfortable so was pretty excited to learn he was bragging to his other daughter. My grandfather is a pretty shy guy. He's got a good sense of humor.

**Annie:**

Can you tell us how the emotional labour in this film may be different than with your other works? I'm thinking particularly about your past show at Stride and the different energy from that exhibition.

**Glenna:**

Stride took about four years because of the pandemic. And it changed so much. I felt that Stride was a different kind of space where we had a lot to say because it was in Calgary and connected to our experience with the Ring Road and our tribe.

What we were able to do with the film at TPW, and being able to have that smudge room, was a huge process. We were able to carry out ceremony and have it be part of us. And not have to smudge in the backroom. Making it very visible because that's how we came to mother earth and how we continue to carry ourselves. It's very important.

And that's how we experienced making *her name*, through ceremony. We needed it to guide us through the experience, to ground us, and to lift us up.

To be in a space like Blue Quills and begin to understand what our relatives have been through—we needed that space of healing.

Though I'm not sure if I can ever be healed. But it continues every day and being able to walk with that knowledge and to pass it on to my kids and to share it with other people.

**seth:**

I feel in our past shows in Calgary, we talk about local politics and our experiences related to conservative governments, the nihilism within our community and tribe, and that work had to have a certain type of fierceness. For this project, we had to find a way to really just have like, a lot of fun and show our family story, and have a bit more care in terms of the way this show is set up.

Our previous work talks about very personal and firsthand experiences.

***With this, there is the potential that it could activate other people's lived experiences through generations.***

So we were thinking about how to provide care for people and experience that potential.

**Annie:**

Can you talk about the scene at parliament?

**seth:**

So the first time I went to Ottawa was in 2019. I was walking around with my secret camera. There was an air show going on just outside of the parliament buildings. I was mesmerized. I didn't know what was going on. While that was happening, there was also construction going on. When I asked the security guard, another brown person— otherwise I wouldn't have asked— what's going on? He's said, "Oh, they're doing renovations on this wing on one of the parliament buildings." And apparently, they uncovered the remains of Indigenous people.

And so, you know, the parliament building is built on top of graves.

I was like, "What?! That is wild."

When I tried to do research on it later I couldn't find anything.

But it was an interesting moment of construction that stopped because they found remains and are figuring out what to do. And while this is going on, there's this huge show with these guys flying out of the sky with Canadian flags.

It was kind of surreal.

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This article is comprised of excerpts from an artist talk by tina gúyání that occurred on October 26, 2023, hosted by Gallery TPW.

Image credit: still from *her name*, courtesy of the artists.