

WAAP

NICO WILLIAMS
chi-miigwech
July 10 - August 14, 2021



Nico Williams
miigwech, miigwech, miigwech, 2021
10/0 glass beads, thread
11.8 x 7.66 x 1 in (30 x 19.5 x 2.5 cm)
WAAP 1521

Wil Aballe Art Projects | WAAP
1129 East Hastings St.
Vancouver, BC
Canada V6A 1S3

EXHIBITION

NICO WILLIAMS

chi-miigwech

July 10 - August 14, 2021

For information, please contact the gallery.

Wil Aballe Art Projects | WAAP
1129 East Hastings St.
Vancouver, BC V6A 1S3
waapart.com

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An Ojibwe artist from Aamjiwnaang First Nation, Nico Williams works with materials like delicas—Japanese glass seed beads—and Indigenous porcupine quills to create geometric beadwork sculptures that revivify living traditions. In his most recent body of work, Williams mimetically reproduces a range of commercial objects that are tied to youth culture, including Zig-Zag rolling papers and scratch lottery tickets—items one might pick up at their local *depanneur* in Montréal, where Williams now lives. The artist renders a range of disposable materials through the meticulous, hand-made process and tradition of beading: in doing so, he rejects disparaging colonialist and racist narratives that circulate about Indigenous cultures, imbuing these with symbols of status and the integrity of everyday life. The works are almost uncanny in their resemblance to the original, quotidian objects they replicate, the glass beads bringing a roundness and warmth of presence to the objects that expands out and beyond “vice.”

The works stand as an Indigenous synthesis of trash culture. Tied as they are to smoking and gambling, the works read less as a vice and more as disposable objects whose ties to Indigenous culture is more nuanced and affirming, from the traditions of gambling in Indigenous cultures to the use of tobacco as a sacred plant. Williams’ work continues these conversations and explorations that are intergenerational and evolving. No longer disposable, these objects that, in the real-world, can only be used once is now preserved as

an indelible object whose tight beadwork holds a tensile strength within the invisible scaffolding of thread-and-bead.

A cartoon version of Williams' face is featured in Delica bead in his 2019 *NDN Status*, a reproduction of an "Indian Status Card" that, like the other objects in this show, bears a tenuous relationship between Indigenous identity and becoming, and the governmental forces of colonialization and paternalistic management of resources and rights. The word "NDN" has been reclaimed and re-inscribed as such by other Indigenous artists and writers in this emerging generation, including Billy-Ray Belcourt and Lindsay Nixon. At the bottom of each of the sculptures, Nico renders his name NICO in the Delicas too, signing his name onto these objects in an act that completes his long engagement with the boundary dividing "high art" from "craft"—a common theme across the rich range of beadwork-based contemporary art practices by Indigenous and Metis artists, including Lisa Myers, Judy Anderson, Olivia Whetung, and Katherine Boyer.

Reproducing pop cultural points of reference from the artist's perspective as a young, Indigenous man who grew up on a reservation and now lives in an urban city centre, the artworks point to recognizable reference points in a way that is timely and fresh, unsettled in its relation between Indigenous and colonial influence. Williams' meticulously beaded works mark a change ahead in which the value of Indigenous life and traditions—old and new—are not doubted.

By Lauren Fournier

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Nico Williams
JM8 & J Cloth, 2021
10/0 glass beads, thread
15 x 11 x 1.02 in (38.1 x 27.9 x 2.6 cm)
WAAP 1522



Nico Williams
Wet Burn, 2021
15/0 glass beads, thread
1.41 x 2.75 x 0.15 in (3.6 x 7 x .4 cm)
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Nico Williams
Free Burn, 2021
15/0 glass beads, thread
1.41 x 2.75 x 0.15 in (3.6 x 7 x .4 cm)
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Nico Williams
Easy Burn, 2021
15/0 glass beads, thread
1.41 x 2.75 x 0.15 in (3.6 x 7 x .4 cm)
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Nico Williams
Le Zouave, 2021
15/0 glass beads, thread
1.41 x 2.75 x 0.15 in (3.6 x 7 x .4 cm)
WAAP 1526



Nico Williams

Play, 2019

Glass beads, wampum cockles
3.5 x 6 x 5 in (8.9 x 15.2 x 12.7 cm)
WAAP 1469

CV

EDUCATION

- 2020 Concordia University - Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture., Tiohtiá:ke I Mooniyang I Montréal , Québec
- 2014 Concordia University - Bachelors of Fine Arts in Print Media. Montréal, Québec

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 Wil Aballe Art Projects. *chi-miigwech*. Vancouver, British Columbia
- 2021 Never Apart. *chi-miigwech*. Montreal, Québec
- 2019 Window gallery. *North of 56*. Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 2018 Atelier Circulaire. *Artist in Residency*. Tiohtiá:ke I Montréal, Québec
- 2018 Ashukan Space. *Mnidnoominehnsuk I Spirit Berries*. Tiohtiá:ke I Montréal, Québec
- 2017 Ojibwe Culture Foundation. *Spirit Transformations*. M'Chigeeng, Manitoulin Island

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 Art Museum at the University of Toronto. *No Plastic Heart: Surface All the Way Through*. Toronto, Ontario
- 2020 Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. *La machine qui enseignait des airs aux oiseaux*. Tiohtiá:ke I Montréal, Québec
- 2019 Indigenous Art Centre, *invisible threads*. Curated by: Michelle LaVallee
Gatineau, Québec
- Johannes Kepler University. *Bridges: Mathematical Art*. Linz, Austria
- Musée des beaux-arts Montréal. *Arts of One World. Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion*. Tiohtiá:ke I Montréal, Québec
- La Guilde. *Beading Now*. Curated by: Karine Gaucher. Tiohtiá:ke I Montréal, Québec
- Victoria Arts Council. *Contrapposto*. Victoria, British Columbia
- 2018 Centre Bang-Espace Virtuel. *The Queen owes me...*, Chicoutimi, Québec
- Gallery 101. Asinabka Festival: *Hot Culture*. Ottawa, Ontario
- Multicultural Heritage Center. *TRC Exhibit*. Stony Plain, Alberta
- 2017 Art Souterrain. *Territories: Kent Monkman, Nadia Myre, Nico Williams*. Tiohtiá:ke I Montréal, Québec
- Heritage Canada. *From here to there: then and now*, 2-year outdoor installation. Ottawa, Ontario

- 2016 Art Mûr. *BACA: Culture Shift - Une révolution culturelle*. Tiohtiá:ke | Montréal, Québec
- 2015 Ashukan Space. *Visions of Peace*. Tiohtiá:ke | Montréal, Québec
Galerie Atelier d'Ile. *Faire Impression au Rouleau Compressé: Impressions Nordique*. Val-David, Québec
UACH Museums Department. *Native Immigrante*. Valdivia, Chile
- 2014 ACC+ VAV Gallery. *Making a Mark*. Tiohtiá:ke | Montréal, Québec
Maison De La Culture Frontenac. *Substance*. Tiohtiá:ke | Montréal, Québec

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Archives Nationales du Québec

Art Gallery of Guelph

Hydro-Québec

Indigenous Art Center, Crown- Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada

Musée des beaux-arts Montréal -The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Ojibwe Cultural Foundation

Royal Bank of Canada Art Collection