EDUC 406

Sydney Borden

Responding to Visual and Performing Art

First Impressions:

When I first saw this painting, I was struck by all the vibrant colours and how all the images seem to be alive. This painting makes me bright and happy, and like I am also connected to and involved with the interactions happening amongst the plants and the animals. When looking at this image I feel like I can truly image myself in that place surrounded by nature and the beauty of life. It both peaceful and invigorating at the same time.

Artist: Christi Belcourt

Title: Our Lives are in the Land

Date: 2014

Media (Materials used): acrylic on canvas

Artist Nationality and birth/death (if known): Michif (Metis) woman from the Metis historic community of Manitou Sakhigan (Lac Ste. Anne) Alberta, Canada. She was born in Scarborough, Ontario on September 24, 1966 and is still living and creating.

1. Description: What do you see?

Main Subject: The trees and the plants

Discuss: Most of the space of the canvas is taken up by the rooted and growing trees and the plants that are growing all around them. As the viewer, my eyes are drawn from the intrinsic roots of the trees upward to the reaching leaves and foliage that reaches to the dark sky. There are also small creatures such as a hummingbirds, butterflies, and fish. However, these creatures are less noticeable and hidden amongst the larger entities of the trees and plants. I think this acts to symbolize the importance of the plants to provide for the animals and may also symbolize their role as provider and nourisher; the cycle of growth.

1. Analysis: how does the following create the given effect?

Main Elements and Strategies used: The artists purposeful placements of the trees and plants to take up the majority of the space presents to the audience the strength and power these hold in the paintings meaning. Belcourt’s decision to have the animals smaller reflects her narrative that they are reliant on the earth and need these supporters in order to grow and live themselves. The vibrant colours used also reflects the life and energy within nature and the cyclical nature of connection amongst all these living things. This image also does not truly include foreground, instead all elements are placed amongst each other in unity to represent harmony and co-existence.

Cultures, styles, time periods: Within Metis art, vibrant and bright colours are often used in contrast to dark backgrounds. This aspect of Belcourt’s culture can clearly be seen here. Beading is also a very prevalent artform amongst many Indigenous cultures, and Belcourt often creates paintings that use dot-work to form her images which acts to reflect that of traditional beadwork. This style can be seen in this piece within the roots, trunks, branches, foliage, water, and even the animals. This styling represents Metis culture and Belcourt’s own roots there. The use of taking up the entire background with little to no empty and or free space is also a cultural style of Metis artwork, which is represented in this painting.

Discuss: I think that Christi Belcourt’s Metis roots and culture are very prominent in this painting. I really appreciated how she used the painting technique of dotting to create an effect that resembled that of beadwork. I think that this technique works well here as well because such beadwork is often created in a way to tell a story and is often centred in nature. I think that Belcourt’s purposeful composition and use of space and scale allows for a greater understanding from her audience in relation to the meaning she is trying to convey. The pattern-like qualities this piece displays also adds the suggestion of story and the passing on of knowledge, as well as the cyclical nature of the natural world.

1. Interpretation:

Main content; (theme, message, mood, feeling): I think the main theme surrounding this painting is that of connection and growth. All of the living elements within this piece are interacting with one another and have stories that interconnect and intertwine with each other. I think perhaps the message it is trying to get across is need we all have for support and the positive relationships we form when we give and receive this. I also think Belcourt is trying to create a respect for the natural around us and they beauty and knowledge it provides if we only take the time to recognize it.

How does it make you feel? How does your response relate to your experiences and perceptions of the world?: This painting makes me feel inspired, peaceful, and joyful. I find this piece to be incredibly captivating and like you are never truly done exploring its communicative or visual components. The way in which this painting has been created immediately drew me in as it sparked my connection with my Metis background. Unfortunately, due to unsavoury dealings far back in my families past, our family has been disconnected to many aspects of our culture. However, having the opportunity to view and respond to this piece has shown me that I know more of my culture than I had realized. It also acted to show me that I have the opportunity to re-learn and re-establish my connection to Metis culture. It also makes me feel a deep connection to the earth and the natural world that lives within it. I think as busy working and bustling humans, we often forget to take moments to connect with nature and place ourselves in the that realm of whole different perspective and way of life. This painting inspires me to reconnect and notice and appreciate the beauty of nature. My responses to this painting reflects my current mindset in that of facilitator and interactor of learning. I see myself as both the trees and plants as well as the animals. As the trees I am grounded and rooted in my own knowledge and I reach upwards to share my knowledge and create opportunities for others to learn. As the animals I am still reliant on the givers of knowledge to expand and grow my own undertesting’s. I think the prominent presentation of connections and relationships in this piece also reflects my perception of the world, especially during these times of COVID, for the need and immense desire for connection.

Background Information:

The description of this panting and what it is acting to portray is given by the artist as such:

*The plants are teachers. They are connected to each other, and all other spiritual beings through the sacredness of life. When I remember who I am – a human being connected to all of life – I remember also that I am loved by the spirit world and our ancestors. And when I remember this, I remember to respect even the smallest of things.* (<http://christibelcourt.com/ancestry/>)

1. Judgment: have your initial impressions changed as a result of discussions, research and reflection?

Resulting from the research and reflection I have done, my initial impressions have not changed much. After discovering the small excerpt provided by Belcourt on her painting I came to understand that my thinking and interpretation of the piece was partly connected to her meanings behind it. I think this painting can be easily interpreted because Belcourt’s techniques and styles used allow for the audience to captivated and feel connected to its subject. This painting places the audience within the artwork and allows for self-exploration and an opportunity to connect to our land without physically being situated within nature.