

Installation view of Kent Monkman's *Théâtre de Cristal* 2007. Video projection in beaded teepee.
PHOTO WALTER WILLEMS



Kent Monkman

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN ART,
TORONTO

The 19th century was an extraordinary period of colonization and cultural expansion. The European powers vied with one another to seize land and explorers were dispatched to open and record these new worlds, annexing territories as they went. Missionaries spreading the word encountered new sexual mores and set about eradicating heathen practices, while commercial interests capitalized on it all.

Kent Monkman is Cree, descended from a society that bore the brunt of this invasion. His father also took on the missionary mantle, so Monkman is uniquely placed to interpret these cultural dynamics. His art is aimed at reasserting the cultural value of Aboriginal society.

The Trickster is an amoral, prank-playing charac-

SUE LLOYD *Nevada Test Site Barrage Balloon* 2007. Ink-jet on archival paper 63.5 x 89 cm



ter from Aboriginal myth. He is a two-spirit creature, frequently containing both masculine and feminine aspects, often indulging in same-sex practices. Yet the prankster also brings healing. Monkman has created a unique alter ego in Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. This regal personage rides a horse and ravages the Wild West. Miss Chief is both male and female, outfitted with weapons and chieftain's bonnet but also pink feathers and pumps, augmented by accessories from Louis Vuitton and the Hudson's Bay Company. Monkman's artistic production encompasses painting, installation, performance and film, thus Miss Chief appears in a number of guises.

In this show, two video works are displayed in teepees, one constructed out of brocade, the other out of crystal beads. Within the bead teepee, a film called *Group of Seven Inches* is projected onto a buffalo robe that lies on the floor. Miss Chief analyzes the virtues of two semi-nude European males she finds and records for posterity. She showers them with whisky and makes them cross-dress in odd uniforms before painting them as stick figures in a comical debunking of the myth of the noble savage. Similarly, in the brocade teepee the video *Shooting Geronimo* spoofs a white film director trying to get some Indians to perform in a stereotypical Western. Things go awry and the director is accidentally shot "by a white man." Miss Chief rescues the stricken director and they ride off into town, only to suddenly disappear.

Monkman's paintings are appropriations of works by 19th-century artists like George Catlin and Paul Kane, who painted the Native people of North America and expressed sentiments about the nobility of this so-called "dying race." Monkman seizes upon the irony in this culturally expansionist perspective, and, in true prankster style, steals the earlier artists' very brush strokes. The viewer is seduced by these sumptuous gilt-framed paintings of mountain vistas and lakes, but up close a bawdy male lineup engages in nefarious doings. The monumental *Trappers of Men* has frontiersmen and Indians lounging about together while photographers and art-historical figures like Piet Mondrian (who loathed nature) are startled by a male nude (reminiscent of Botticelli's *Venus*) emerging from a lake.

The sense of fun in this exhibition is palpable, and it also poses the serious question of what is natural and valuable in human nature. Monkman is brilliant. **ASHLEY JOHNSON**

Sue Lloyd

SPIN GALLERY, TORONTO

Unravelling the threads of meaning in the 13 images that constitute Sue Lloyd's newest body of digital work, "VOID," resembles the impossible task of reading for univocal meaning in Virginia Woolf's experimental novels. For Lloyd's viewer, the task is open-ended and fluid, with multiple points of entry but no narrative line. Her viewer encounters a sea of dangling signifiers, uncannily familiar despite their disconnected state. Yet these remixes of found source material propose the possibility of