



Kent Monkman

# Re-imagining History

Kent Monkman is one of eight contemporary artists whose works are featured in the exhibition *Shapeshifters, Time Travellers, and Storytellers*. A painter, filmmaker, and performance artist, Kent also appeared—as his alter ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle—at the ROM in October. Kelvin Browne, executive director Marketing and Commercial Development at the ROM and former ICC managing director, asked Kent about this work.

**Kelvin Browne:** You've received much critical acclaim for your re-interpretations of Paul Kane paintings. One of your works in *Shapeshifters, Time Travellers, and Storytellers*, for instance, is a fascinating companion to a Paul Kane painting from the ROM's collection—*Medicine Mask Dance* (c. 1848 to 1856)—that is displayed next to it.

**Kent Monkman:** The paintings of the Hudson River School and the works of artists such as George Catlin and Paul Kane intrigue me. For many, these Romantic visions of the New World and its Aboriginal people were assumed to be literal depictions, a kind of reportage photography of the wild landscape and the "romantic savage." Of course, these painters brought their own values and expectations to their work, and these, as much as what they were painting, informed the work. They took a significant license in their paintings.

My work, in many ways, challenges their vision of the world. I'm re-imagining their world and I'm bringing my own perspective, my own values and prejudices, to it. Much like George Catlin, who occasionally put himself in his paintings, I insert myself—as Miss Chief—in some of the works, too. I'm also mixing in other images, from the Baroque to the Romantic, perhaps as these European-trained artists did, consciously or unconsciously, to comment on their images of the 19th-century world that many take for granted as accurate.

The result is rather a mixed metaphor but one that nonetheless explores the notion of Aboriginal identity, particularly the imposition of a belief system on a culture. It's a re-imagining of the past that questions the basis for many of our beliefs today.

*Shapeshifters, Time Travellers, and Storytellers* is on display until February 28, 2008. Co-organized by the ROM's Institute for Contemporary Culture and the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival.

**ICC** AT THE ROM