

## reflections on *spilling out, spilling over*

by Erica Violet Lee

March 13, 2022

At first glance, the style of the paintings appears steeped in the traditions of much Indigenous art that came before, as well as those pieces that are still held up as the epitome of “Indigenous works of Art”. Curved lines, circles, bright and intermingling colours. There is a fundamental difference here regarding for whom the artist is painting. The work of Quill Violet Christie-Peters is a feast for the heart and a soothing touch for the bodies we make homes as Indigenous women, Two-Spirits, and Queer folks. Her paint is movement on the canvas, circles widening and closing, ever-changing. Everything regenerates and nothing is wasted – neither in the space of the canvas nor the blood that has left our bodies by the pull of the moon.

In *desire spilling over body and time*, Christie-Peters is at her most curious, playful, and tempestuous self. The piece is a whirlwind of softly blended yet starkly visible individual elements, with splashes of colour blending into one another while still retaining clear shape and form. The main person depicted has long, voluminous black hair and a dark patch of pubic hair, with brown skin and nipples. Their arms appear strong and slender with broad shoulders. Their expression appears to indicate peaceful thoughts, though the smudging of boundaries suggests a near-dissolving into the background. Given the context of Christie-Peters’ work, I know this overflow of boundaries is quite deliberate and highly political. While the black-haired person depicted and their very embodied being spills into the circular and joyful purples, oranges and bright blues, the people (and the creatures) retain their agential form. Not a single element of the painting is ever completely lost to the gentle circular motions of time, timelessness, and rebirth. This technique illuminates a distinction between the assimilative project of the Canadian state and the practices we draw from our own notions of interconnectivity. Unlike the expectations placed on Indigenous people to fully integrate into Canada as means to secure a good life, many of us choose to do exactly what we want. We create art which brings us the deep joys no form of recognition ever could, because to do anything else is a waste of time.

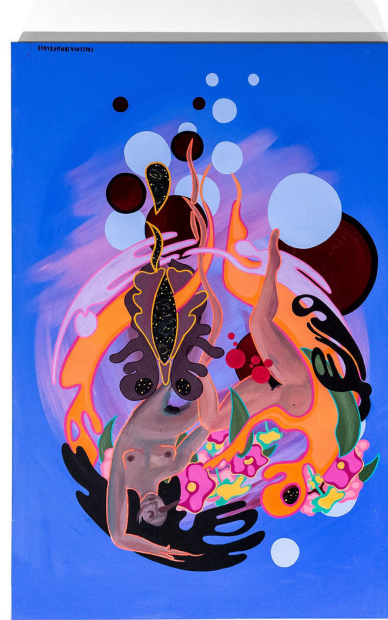
In *making my homelands shake and feel good too*, Christie-Peters invokes spirits that link outer space, the earth, and our erotic, messy insides. Creating art about our own pleasure in such a way is not what this country wants of Indigenous artists. Settlers desire the “sacred”, they desire to be “let in” to Indigeneity and all of its perceived magic and secrets, while at the same time marking our very bodies as disposable. *Making my homelands shake and feel good too* hints at the inextricability of land from body, and, furthermore, how the most “sacred” of our responsibilities as cis Indigenous women is being a “lifegiver”, or reproducing. The portrayal of menstruation as a process as natural as pregnancy or birthing; sacredness, reclaimed for our own damn selves and not for the intensely dehumanizing pressure of “(re)building a nation”. Blood is everywhere, but it is not horrific. Blood grows from the ground and it lines sheets of birchbark on trees. Blood in flowers and the darkness of the forest may seem counterintuitive, but with the artist’s skill they prompt a righteous fearlessness. Another spark here is the explicit association of the process of menstruation and menstrual blood with pleasure. Rather than teaching us to fear menstruation or allowing girls and women to go their

entire lives believing that menstruation must equal pains that we are bound to endure, Christie-Peters invites back joy to the event. No, our sacredness is not in the amount of pain we can endure. No, our sacredness is not in the amount of restraint and obedience and self-sacrifice we practice. Our sacredness is inherent in that we are a part of the earth, irremovable eternally. Everything regenerates.

As Indigenous artists, we -- and our work, but also our very selves -- are only accepted when we adhere to specific forms, methods, and even mediums that fit a notion of what “Indigenous art” is and can be. Canada dictates what we create by the very fact of its existence. Canada: that suffocating project under which we are forced to create as Indigenous artists because of colonialism that never ended. Yet even the greatest empires fall, and as Indigenous peoples, we have memories existing ages before this country was even glimpsed or imagined by colonizers. More than memories, more than the past (though precious), we have artists and many others (re)creating not only the future but the present moment. It is in this sphere where Christie-Peters shines – her work is topical and necessary, now. In the exhibition *spilling out, spilling over*, she demonstrates her sharply honed talent, stepping fully into her own as an artist while building a respite from expectation and respectability. She plays with typical ideas of “acceptable” topic material for Indigenous artwork and oftentimes obliterates them entirely. Offering representation is not necessarily our obligation as Indigenous artists but being careful and kind with one another – person or animal alike – is certainly a valued teaching fundamentally distinct from the colonial force. Christie-Peters’ work is nothing short of a manifesto toward sensuality, a life beyond borders, and a show of embodied power to spite those who would name us conquered. These paintings are echoes and blueprints, individual stars and entire universes.

Erica Violet Lee is a nēhiyaw poet, musician, and community organizer from inner-city Saskatoon. She has a few academic degrees but even more guitars. Erica tweets about joy and freedom @EricaVioletLee and writes at moontimewarrior.com.

Quill Violet Christie-Peters  
*desire spilling over body and time*, 2018, acrylic on canvas.  
Collection of the Artist. Photograph by Carey Shaw.



Quill Violet Christie-Peters  
*making my homelands shake and feel good too*, 2018, acrylic on canvas.  
Collection of the Artist. Photograph by Carey Shaw.



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COLLEGE ART GALLERY 2  
Quill Violet Christie-Peters: *spilling out, spilling over*  
with artworks by Ron Peters  
Exhibition: Jan 14 - April 22, 2022  
curator, Leah Taylor  
exhibition essay, Erica Violet Lee

