

Tāltān artist Tšēmā Igharas' name translates to "Mother of rocks," a name as complex as the particular socio-ecological, familial and economic conditions of her home territory, Tāltān Nation in what is now known as British Columbia. Igharas' practice is a confluence of Indigenous futurisms and the complexity of being an Indigenous person currently living within the settler state of so-called Canada. While mining and other extractive industries are prominent across Tāltān Territory, there is a kind of sovereignty that exists against the backdrop of extraction: Tāltān people are consulted prior to projects being approved and certain percentages of Tāltān people must in turn be employed by mining projects on their territory. For Igharas, this means having simultaneously worked for extractive industries while protesting their impact on the land, a tension that threads her work. Without an understanding of the industries that are impacting the land, how can we resist them? Here, there is care for the rocks, as a mother to a child.

Potlatch methodology is central to Igharas' practice and personal life. The artist describes this methodology as mindful consumption, an alternative to capitalism, an everyday act of decolonization. Potlatch is an ancient system, a descendant of earlier feast systems that formed the basis of social, legal and spiritual life in the Pacific Northwest. They are ceremonial; they're where business is undertaken, names are given, and stories and traditions are shared. As ceremony, it is relational unlike capitalism's hierarchical structures that focus on individualistic ideas of the self, unchecked desires for gain—material gluttony—and entitlement to consume as one pleases, unconsciously as though resources are perennially endless.

Igharas' most recent major project, *Black Gold*, reckons with these complex tensions in Potlatch methodology and extractive implication; it was first presented at Untitled Art Society (UAS) in Spring 2019, following many months of research and an artist-led residency in Alberta. A portrait of raw bitumen masks UAS' front window, simultaneously brilliant, sparkling and woeful, menacing, even, when one considers how bitumen is a shapeshifter in the context of our everyday lives. Shapeshifting abounds: at the back of the gallery, neat on an exact and reflective black plinth, is a stomach

sculpted of raw bitumen, glittering and odorous; when close, the work is noxious, olfactory traces of its origin, the stench of the long-decomposed, once-living bodies of which it is constituted. Igharas' inclusion of raw bitumen offers a much-needed dis-alienation from the matter literally fueling our lives and livelihoods.

While conducting research for *Black Gold* in Fort McMurray, a forest fire was burning in Tāltān territory; the smoke and ash wafted over the Rockies, reaching her in Alberta, an acknowledgment of the validity of the connections she was making between Tāltān Territory and Fort McMurray—a confirmation of the connectedness of all things. A core box, used for mineral samples in extractive research, here is filled with jars of salmon from the artists' home territory. A Tāltān tent structure made of copper poles hosts a blanket made of a photoprint of bitumen. The blanket is adorned with abalone buttons, traditionally traded and used on regalia; here, they are sewn in the pattern of the smoke from the fires on Tāltān Territory. At first glance the repeated image of bitumen can be mistaken for stars, simulating a sky for the abalone smoke trails to move through. A pillar: wrapped by the image of a prize core sample. A sheet of copper transparency dances with the light, and is held down with melted pennies. Copper is a mineral prominent in Tāltān territory, salmon a threatened but integral resource, abalone buttons: a surviving cultural pillar. Here, Igharas has made links between the resources her ancestors have relied on for millennia, and the ancient decomposing creatures found in the ground throughout Alberta. But perhaps more ardently, she has presented a series of revitalizations, things that persist despite years of active cultural genocide.

In her video, "Tāltān for Reclamation 2" (2019), recently shown in TRUCK Contemporary Art's *Taskoch pipon kona kah nipa muskoseya, nepin pesim eti pimachihew* | *Like the winter snow kills the grass, the summer sun revives it*, curated by Missy LeBlanc, fires figure again. In this video Igharas wears a caribou hide over her shoulders with the word "esghanānā" (Tāltān for give it back to me) cut into it. The hide also serves as a screen for the video, casting "esghanānā" on the wall behind it. Central to the video is a boulder: Igharas dusts it off carefully, removing ashes from the fires, setting the hide stencil over the rock, and spray painting esghanānā in safety orange

onto the soot- and flora-dusted boulder. Igharas then wipes away the spray paint, after she is done with the video, which came off quite easily because of the layers of debris. But, two letters remained: “es”, the Tāltān pronoun for “me.”

Mother of rocks, Igharas’ practice is one of resistance. She complicates considerations of Indigenous ways of knowing that acknowledge the industries present on our territories. This acknowledgement is a seed for Indigenous futures, a complex, decolonial means for working through these challenging, seemingly diametric, spaces.

Bio:

Mercedes Webb (Malidi Hanuse) is a writer and art historian of Haida, Kwakwaka’wakw and mixed settler background. Webb lives and works as a guest on Treaty 7 Territory, in Mohkínstsis. Her writing aims to employ Indigenous epistemologies and personal experience to the methods of contemporary art writing. She is a recent graduate of the University of Calgary, where she completed an undergraduate degree in Art History and Communication Studies. She has recently published writing in Frieze Magazine and Rungh. Currently, she is the Outreach Coordinator Intern at Untitled Art Society, secretary on the Board of Directors for Mountain Standard Time Performative Art and assistant at Herringer Kiss Gallery.