



20x20 Vision for walking in 2040 from Elinor Whidden - Transcript

My name is **Elinor Whidden** and I am an artist living and working in Toronto Canada. For many years my art practice investigated myths of the North American western frontier, as a way to go teach contemporary car culture. Dressed as a modern day voyager, I turned old cars into canoes, knapsacks, snowshoes, walking sticks and other modes of transportation used during the opening of the Western frontier.

These objects were then portaged, dragged or carried along early fur trade routes. During these car-carrying performances, the waterways and trade routes of this historic period stood in as the forefathers to our current systems of highways, freeways and over passes. These car carrying adventures were a way to examine how and why Canada's colonial history continues to repeat itself.

Two years ago my art practice shifted from a general critique of colonisation to a genealogically specific look at how my own ancestors' first steps in Canada have impacted who I am and where I stand on Turl Island or North America today. Canada is currently in a period of reckoning, facing its own Colonial history of genocide towards First Nation's people and the unfair treaty process which co-opted indigenous land for the newly arrived settlers. Our Truth and Reconciliation Commission asks all Canadians to relearn our history and begin to honour the treaty promises that's allowed European settlers to come and prosper here in Canada.

My new art project is called "My land acknowledgement shoes". *My land acknowledgement shoes* grew out of the realisation that it was time to make my critique of colonisation personal. I decided to start educating myself by learning about the land where my ancestors first stepped foot in Canada and how this access to land has privileged me today. Tracing back through my two grandmothers I have made footwear for myself inspired by the journeys of two men: Robert Colquhoun, who came from Scotland to become a merchant and Indian agent in 1803 in Charlottenburg, Ontario and Lawrence Good Murphy, who came from Ireland in 1822 and who worked as a shoemaker, farmer and dry goods merchant near Wellington, Prince Edward County.

These *land acknowledgement shoes* each embody specific ancestral stories and specific treaty knowledge particularly any information I found related to how my distant ancestors "got land, used land" and who the local indigenous nations were at the time of their arrival.

Each pair of shoes is custom-made to fit my foot. The shoes are made from material scavenged directly from the land where these men first set foot. For example, the Robert Colquhoun brogues include a Tim Morton's coffee cup, a miracle grow bag, tarp and birch twig. The Good Murphy Wellington boots are made from some old furniture vinyl, some tyevec, a bible, a seat cover and some corn husks. Scavenging these materials right from the land is an ongoing acknowledgement that everything comes from the Earth and everything returns there too. This work is about learning the specifics of my own settler history, in order to repair my relationship with this land and the indigenous people who have always lived there. As a settler, I need to figure out how to honour the treaty promises that allowed my ancestors to come and prosper here in Canada.



My land acknowledgement shoes cover stories at the time of my ancestors' first steps in Canada but more importantly begin my own journey of learning about and enacting the treaty responsibilities I have to the various First Nations whose friendship and generosity to my ancestors has been repaid with a royal punch in the face.

My vision for 2014 is not so much about the act of walking itself, but more about the act of thinking about the land on which we walk.

As an artist my work driven by my dismay at the way we treat the land, our collective environment. Our human-centric vision has severed the connection with the land that supports all of our lives.

My hope therefore for 2040, is that where ever we walk, we will be in some kind of relationship with the land we traverse. I want us all to know, to intimately know, that the land provides us with everything. I want to be thankful for what that land gives us, but more importantly, I want us also to think about what we give back to the land.