



Aboriginal Sketch Club

*Pimup Toon Kitchi Animoosh
(The Great Dog Race)*





Aboriginal Sketch Club:

Cheyenne Henry
 Melissa Wastasecoot
 Todd L'Hirondelle
 John Schneider
 Riel Benn

Organized sports have been used to create community cohesion in seemingly disparate populations of people for as long as sports has been part of the human experience. During the past century, North American sports teams have—since their inception into organized bodies—broadly utilized images of Aboriginal peoples into their identities.

Logos are designed as a quick take on the ideals a team wishes to embody. So, the Cincinnati Tigers or Georgia Bulldogs are meant to indicate traits of viciousness, veraciousness, and pride. When indigenous peoples are transformed into logos, it carries the implication that these logos are also a quick take on traits presumed to be inherent: savagery, bravery, stoicism. The unfortunate reality is that the non-Aboriginal public has not always thought twice about the practice of the “tomahawk chop” at Atlanta Braves games or the antics of the Chief Wahoo (aka Red Sambo) mascot at Cleveland Indian games. They have not been recognized for the dehumanizing gestures they are.

Throughout human history, whole cultures have implicitly conceded to derogatory symbolizations of various groups, as Nazi Germany used rats to embody all the presumed traits of the Jewish race. This process of dehumanization creates a means for justifying the demise of the group in question. It makes it easier to hate.

Pimup Toon Kitchi Animoosh is not intended as a simple display of reverse racism. Racism is complex and cannot be

described or delineated merely according to color. The term embodies complexities that include historical incongruities, control of justice, education, and legislated systems. In short, the issue of power and who wields the power.

The sports industry has had a history of supplying multiple images—intended, as logos, to create community cohesion—which arrived with a generous dose of systemic racism. Young and non-Aboriginal peoples are unwittingly taught how to internalize these racial assumptions through the constant bombardment through the media, as participants or fans. Racism becomes internalized through this process of dehumanization.

This exhibition examines and reflects upon this practice by having Aboriginal artists create logos based on images perceived to reflect non-Aboriginals. The resulting faux logos have been juxtaposed and integrated with the “real” logos and memorabilia. In doing so, it highlights the practice of using Aboriginal peoples as mascots for one of the highest-paid professional activities in North America.



The intention of this exercise of re-branding is to call attention to the way Aboriginal peoples are displayed, commodified, and essentially owned by non-Aboriginals. The “race” in question is the human one, which has entered the 21st century knowingly exercising this form of racism, which has been deemed palatable and justifiable to the general public.

Leanne L'Hirondelle
Louis Ogemah
Project Curators

Wounded Knee



Crusades

The issue of misrepresenting Aboriginal peoples for the sake of a slick logo is not a problem of quantity. The greater proportion of professional sports teams are littered with names that include animals (living and extinct), birds (songbirds and birds of prey), weather conditions, geography, other ancient peoples (pirates and Vikings), city-centric references (apt and obscure), and a host of other references, the inspired and the banal. But in the more egregious examples that do occur—the Redskins, the Indians—there is the problem of the underlying assumptions, the racism, feeding these images and enabling their continued usage.

It's a little difficult to deny the shuck and jive/Amos & Andy/just-happy-to-be-the-white man's-pet quality of the Cleveland Indians logo (deftly reversed here as the Cleveland Honkies). Defenders of the image may claim that it's fairly innocuous and that most names/logos, over time, lose the impact

of whatever they originally referenced. Even if that's true, it doesn't assuage the derogatory sting of its use. Generations of Native North Americans unsuccessfully stave off genocide and their descendents must endure the crass, commercial debasement of their culture and image.

The work organized here by curators Leanne L'Hirondelle and Louis Ogema and produced by a young collective of Native Canadians under the rubric Aboriginal Sketch Club should not be misperceived as a diatribe against sports logos. In order to be effective, these artists must have an innate appreciation for the aesthetic best that logos can sometimes represent. Their new designs are immensely effective and reveal a keen understanding of branding, how to concoct and illustrate a deep message with a single image. The choice to incline toward parody enables these artists to avoid proselytizing while still getting their point across.

In their design for the North American Stealers, it is sufficiently funny that a white football player is making a run for it with North America tucked under his arm. But the player is simultaneously looking behind him, adding a surreptitious quality to the act. The logo of the Capital City White devils features what looks like an effectively slimy white man, presumably burning in hell. The Vatican City Pope 'n' Pedophiles is a scathingly funny name on its own, but the addition of a winking, thumbs-up Pope to the design is appropriately mocking of the Catholic Church's unfortunate habit of shielding sex offenders.

In fact, the Sketch Club logo designs are often historically apt. There's no denying that Landgrabbers throughout history have tended to be Imperial. Or that Treaty Breakers have tended to look like staid, senatorial white men (in this case, Canada's first Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald). The hyperbole is all in the design and it's used as a reminder

of just how convincingly assumptions can be presented and believed. One of the sexiest of the Sketch Club logos is for the Atlanta White Devils—swooping letters with a tri-color fade, yellow and orange flames framing the words, and an elegant looking hooded figure (with tail!). It's a loaded, direct, and hugely disparaging logo but it works because it's presented with the same savvy sense of design that can sell us a warlike Native profile framed by tomahawks—as in my favorite childhood hockey team, the Chicago Black Hawks.

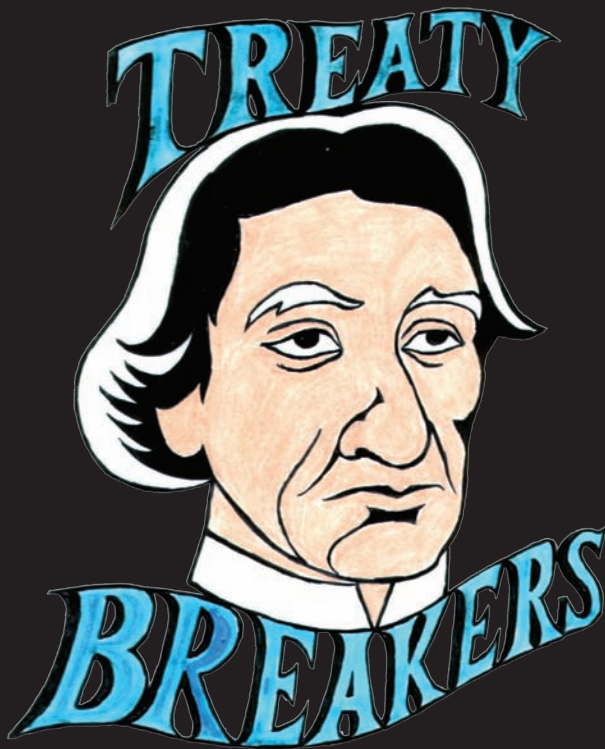
The Great Dog Race of the title is not a competition of huskies bounding through the snow, but a desultory means of describing the human race. In replacing “human” with “great dog,” the Aboriginal Sketch Club are introducing the notion of breeding—and all that breeding implies—into the broader equation. It points to the base and shallow stupidity at the heart of racist presumptions, the notion that any race can be truthfully represented through a few broad strokes, can be categorized as we would a breed of dog. When we proceed from this belief—zeroing in on a single, presumptive quality and exaggerating it for dramatic effect—we reduce ourselves and those to whom we refer as something less than human.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator
Hallwalls



The Aboriginal Sketch Club is comprised of practicing Aboriginal visual artists who came together in late 2000 to engage in a critical discourse of each other's works and to further develop as artists in pro-active sketch sessions.





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