In the end, I realized I was making a piece that told me I was enough and people like me are enough. I realized that making this work is important and that it’s okay to have a community that isn’t the community you envisioned. It is important to bring people into a relationship all together, even if for a moment. It’s about looking at the materials and remembering all of this came from people that I know; all of this came from relationships. The deer hide I tanned, the deer came from 45 minutes away from here. The circle in Caroline Parker Didn’t Ask for This is made of bits of Annuity Cloth torn-out of frustration and made into something new and powerful; not just for me, not just for Haudenosaunee people, not just for indigenous people, but for all people. Because I think that deep down we are all grieving some loss of knowing what it means to be human, to be in relationship to one another, in relationship to the land, and feeling the joyous frustrations of the responsibility to these places for generations before us and generations forward. And even if that didn’t come through my work, I am so grateful for the exhausting week that I had and I am so grateful that you are all here to share this moment together.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised in what is currently considered Buffalo, NY, Jodi Lynn Maracle is a Karien’khehkwa mother, artist, teacher and language learner. Maracle utilizes Haudenosaunee material, language, and techniques, such as hand tanning deer hides and corn husk twining, in conversation with soundscapes, projections, video, and performance to interrogate questions of place, power, erasure, story making, and responsibility to the land. She has shown her work throughout Di/iii With One Spoon Territory in site specific installation performances such as the Mush Hole Project at the Mohawk Institute Residential School (home of the Woodland Cultural Centre) in Brantford, ON, as well as the Gardiner Museum in Toronto, ON, ArtPark in Lewiston, NY, and Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Art Center in Buffalo, NY. Her research as a PhD student at the University at Buffalo focuses on Haudenosaunee material culture, language, land and birth practices. Of her accomplishments, she is most proud to hear her child speak their Mohawk language each day.

I also realized that I was making a series of works about the weight of feeling like I’m failing at saving our language, our culture, and teaching my children what it means to be indigenous in a world that doesn’t want you to exist. In this place where so many lovely people came and out of BAS, and I was so grateful for the help, but at the same time feeling the weight of explaining the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua over and over, I had to explain that Annuity Cloth is the only piece of that treaty that is upheld even though the treaty was supposed to protect us for all generations until the rivers don’t flow, until the grass is no longer green.

In this place where so many lovely people came, in this place where the grass is no longer green, that is upheld even though that treaty was supposed to exist. In this place where so many lovely people came, I had to explain that making this work is important and that it’s okay to have a community that isn’t the community you envisioned. It is important to bring people into a relationship all together, even if for a moment. It’s about looking at the materials and remembering all of this came from people that I know; all of this came from relationships. The deer hide I tanned, the deer came from 45 minutes away from here. The circle in Caroline Parker Didn’t Ask for This is made of bits of Annuity Cloth torn-out of frustration and made into something new and powerful; not just for me, not just for Haudenosaunee people, not just for indigenous people, but for all people. Because I think that deep down we are all grieving some loss of knowing what it means to be human, to be in relationship to one another, in relationship to the land, and feeling the joyous frustrations of the responsibility to these places for generations before us and generations forward. And even if that didn’t come through my work, I am so grateful for the exhausting week that I had and I am so grateful that you are all here to share this moment together.

ARTIST STATEMENT

When I began conceptualizing this installation, I thought I was going to make a piece about my relationship to Buffalo, about the ways that I’ve experienced the land and the people, and my mourning of the loss of the visual, the visceral, the robbing of everything that it meant to be Mohawk, to understand what it meant to be human, and what it means to be in relationship to the natural world; in relationship to the land and in relationship to the water. I don’t mean a romanticized view of land or water as clean and pure, not what comes out of your faucet, but what our water is today, that sometimes we can’t touch it, that sometimes it’ll make our children sick, but that we still love it and appreciate it. It is still medicine for us even to just look upon the water when we have the opportunity. These pieces of wood at the center of Medicine Circle came from a moment where my children were able to be present for the pounding of black ash logs that had been donated to our communities. People from all different communities came together to bring these logs that have nourished and sustained us for generations. My daughter, who wasn’t interested at first, came around when she saw how joyous this experience was. She made this piece with my two year old son who could also pound those logs.

I also realized that I was making a series of works about the weight of feeling like I’m failing at saving our language, our culture, and teaching my children what it means to be indigenous in a world that doesn’t want you to exist. In this place where so many lovely people came and out of BAS, and I was so grateful for the help, but at the same time feeling the weight of explaining the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua over and over, I had to explain that Annuity Cloth is the only piece of that treaty that is upheld even though the treaty was supposed to protect us for all generations until the rivers don’t flow, until the grass is no longer green.

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According to the treaty, the cloth was to be distributed to certain Haudenosaunee nations on the US side of the Border each year as reparations for the land. The cloth is an annual renewal and affirmation of this nation-to-nation relationship, but through the incessant violations of this treaty, it amounts to little more than a token apology.

The reality is that nowadays there are far more people in these participating nations than there were when the treaty was written, so each family is allotted a much smaller amount. Every year since 1794, the US government has distributed the same amount of new cloth that is then divided up and given to each family. Because there are more people in the families, over time, each family gets less cloth. Families will save up their rations of this cloth for years and years to be able to have a meaningful amount. The dress in Medicine Circle, which I wore when I performed Why Here Why Now? is made out of Annuity Cloth that was gifted to me by Tuscarora and Seneca families. The Tuscarora family is my eldest daughter’s father’s family and the Annuity Cloth is made out of Annuity Cloth that was gifted to me by Tuscarora and Seneca families. The Tuscarora family is my eldest daughter’s father’s family and the Annuity Cloth was made by my eight-year-old daughter. It was her first time being present for basket making. We worked together and pounded the logs. My two-year-old son even pounded the logs along with a dozen or so basket makers from my partner Caleb’s home territory. So much laughter and sharing of stories, along with the language and the teaching, went into making this thing that looks so mundane and so silly and so poorly formed. It is my biggest joy that she was able to make that object and I had to show it because this is what our reclamation looks like in action, whether it is worthy of someone else’s praise or not. It is important to recognize that we are still able to do these things.

I tried to honor to my friends and family too. A friend was clearing some birch on their land and so we just trekked out across her land in Six Nations with our three kids. I was also pregnant and we were lugging birch branches back to the car. We had to keep taking pit stops and all the while the tiny grandpa is telling us the best way to do stuff. Those relationships are all of this. So much joy, laughter, and mud went into all of this and I would be doing it such a disservice if I were to just let these objects sit in my basement. That little woven piece in Medicine Circle was made by my eight-year-old daughter. It was her first time being present for basket making. We worked together and pounded the logs. My two-year-old son even pounded the logs along with a dozen or so basket makers from my partner Caleb’s home territory. So much laughter and sharing of stories, along with the language and the teaching, went into making this thing that looks so mundane and so silly and so poorly formed. It is my biggest joy that she was able to make that object and I had to show it because this is what our reclamation looks like in action, whether it is worthy of someone else’s praise or not. It is important to recognize that we are still able to do these things.

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