

GALLERY 101  
APRIL 30 - MAY 28 2022

Michelle Sound

## WE TAKE CARE OF US

*Exhibition Essay by Joi T. Arcand*



GALLERY 101  
JUNE 11 - JULY 16 2022

# We take care of us.

TEXT BY JOI T. ARCAND

As Michelle Sound's solo exhibition, *We Take Care of Us* was getting ready to open at Gallery 101 in Ottawa, I was on my way to St. Paul, Alberta, which is very close to her family's traditional territories in Lac La Biche in Treaty 6 Territory and a bit further from Swan River First Nation in Treaty 8 Territory. Although I wasn't able to experience the exhibition in person, I felt a closeness to the work as I began a 6-week course in Hide Tanning at University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'i nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills. Michelle's work was on my mind as I fleshed and softened moose, elk, and buffalo hides - I thought about the skilled labour of generations of Cree and Métis women that often goes unnoticed. *We Take Care of Us* fixes that by paying tribute to the women in Michelle's family who kept these land-based practices alive in order to provide for their families. Her work connects generations through her mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and aunts; and is brought to life through her son's participation in her art practice.

The hard work and soft determination of Michelle's Cree and Métis grandmothers is represented in an earlier series called *Trapline – Capan Snares Rabbits*. The rabbit fur drums in the series are delicate and soft and dyed in Michelle's signature pastel palette – reflections of the warmth and care given by her grandmothers to their families as they trapped and snared rabbits to make a living. In the exhibition, a complementary series called *HBC Trapline* takes us further back in time when Michelle's ancestors were actively participating in the fur trade. The four drums are dyed the same colours that are found on Hudson's Bay Company four-point blankets: red, yellow, blue and green. Under each drum is

Cover: *NDN Aunties* (detail)

Wood drum frames, artificial sinew, denim, leather, rabbit fur.

Photo: Shelby Lisk

one beaver pelt, four in total – which according to some records, is the number of pelts that could be traded for one HBC blanket. This historical connection is important because HBC blankets began to replace rabbit fur blankets, which were processed, and sewn together by women. Michelle draws attention to the erasure of Indigenous women's expertise and labour in the fur trade.

Michelle's *NDN Aunties* and *Seventies Mama* series form her monumental tributes to the special relationships we have to all our little mothers. The drums are stretched with the textures, patterns and colours worn by Michelle's birth mom, Theresa, in the 70's and by our jazzy NDN aunts in the 90's. I pictured perms and mile-high bangs, dark-tinted INAC glasses, cigarettes and laughter. I couldn't help but think of my late Aunty who passed away in March 2020, right before the pandemic – she was the epitome of Aunty Magic. Michelle's series so perfectly encapsulates these memories – each drum made from carefully thrifted pieces, an activity she shares with her son, subtly continuing the work started by her grandmothers.



*HBC Trapline*

Dyed rabbit fur on wood drum frames, artificial sinew, and beaver pelts

Photo: Shelby Lisk



#### **NDN Aunties (detail)**

Denim on wood drum frame. Aunty Magic pin by Mad Aunty Joi T. Arcand  
Photo: Shelby Lisk

For Aunty Brenda:

I'm sorry for breaking your cigarettes in half and flushing them down the toilet when I was young. You see, I was trying to save you like those school health videos told me to. You were mad at me, but I knew you still loved me. **We take care of us.** "Go to town with your Aunty, don't be shy." You drove us down dusty roads to go get more smokes and some hickory sticks for me. I probably didn't say a word and admired you while you just drove and talked and laughed. I felt safe with you. **We take care of us.** Remember that time you "chaperoned" my sister at a bush party? You watched out for her but still let her have a good time (you had a good time too) armed with walkie talkies and an attitude. **We take care of us.** You were beautiful and funny and had the biggest heart. Like that time you walked into the house carrying a box with an injured hawk inside it. You couldn't let it suffer and saved it from the road. **We take care of us.** Or that time when my stupid high school boyfriend acted up in the middle of Main Street while we were drinking at the bar. I confronted him because I knew you were behind me. **Because, we take care of us.**



***NDN Aunties (left) and Seventies Mama***  
Gallery 101 installation view  
Photo: G101/Kristina Corre



***kîspin kisâkihin (if you love me)***

Film still courtesy Michelle Sound. 2021

Kokum and nôsisim spend some quiet time together. Nôsisim helps his kokum make coffee and they enjoy some food and a little song. A gentle reminder to respect and support our Elders slow pace and the importance of intergenerational love and care.

**Michelle Sound** is a Cree and Métis artist, educator and mother. She is a member of Wapsewsipi Swan River First Nation in Northern Alberta. Her mother is Cree from Kinuso, Alberta, Treaty 8 territory and her father's family is Métis from the Buffalo Lake Métis settlement in central Alberta. She was born and raised on the unceded and ancestral home territories of the x<sup>w</sup>məθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Simon Fraser University, School for the Contemporary Arts, and a Master of Applied Arts from Emily Carr University Art + Design. Michelle is currently an Indigenous Advisor at Douglas College and has taught workshops as a guest artist at the Richmond Art Gallery and the Contemporary Art Gallery.

Michelle acknowledges the support of Canada Council for the Arts.

[www.michellesound.art](http://www.michellesound.art)

**Joi T. Arcand** is an artist from Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, Saskatchewan, Treaty 6 Territory, currently residing in Ottawa, Ontario. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with Great Distinction from the University of Saskatchewan in 2005. In 2018, Arcand was shortlisted for the prestigious Sobey Art Award. Her practice includes photography, digital collage, and graphic design and is characterized by a visionary and subversive reclamation and indigenization of public spaces through the use of Cree language and syllabics.

[www.joitarcand.com/](http://www.joitarcand.com/)



***Seventies Mama (detail)***  
Wood drum frames, artificial sinew, denim, leather, rabbit fur.  
Photo: Shelby Lisk

# Exhibition Statement

By Michelle Sound

*We Take Care of Us* explores personal and familial narratives with a consideration of Indigenous artistic processes. Through drum making, caribou hair tufting, beadwork, and photography Michelle Sound engages traditional practices with contemporary materials and processes to highlight themes of maternal labour, identity, relationships to land, and cultural knowledges. By invoking the bold personalities and stories of her aunties and mother, Michelle’s works celebrate acts of care and joy rooted in family and community.



**GALLERY 101 is a non-profit artist-run-centre**

Gallery 101 honours and respects the original people of the territory we currently occupy: unceded and unsurrendered Anishnaabe-Aki who have been living, working, and caring for this land since time immemorial.

Gallery 101 exhibits contemporary visual, media, and performance arts that explore self-representations of decolonizing, feminist, intersectional counter-narratives.

We acknowledge support from our sponsors: The City of Ottawa, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Ontario Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts; as well as our project partners, and all our relations.

[G101.ca/become-member](http://G101.ca/become-member)

Catalogue design by Kristina Corre



Ontario  
Trillium  
Foundation



Fondation  
Trillium  
de l'Ontario



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO  
an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des arts  
du Canada