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Using Art as a Catalyst for Change

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Land Acknowledgement

NPI would like to acknowledge the First Peoples on whose traditional territories we live and work. NPI is grateful for the opportunity to have our offices located on these lands and thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land.

Our main offices:

- Thunder Bay on Robinson-Superior Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg and Fort William First Nation.
- Sudbury is on the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnaabeg as well as Wahnapiitae First Nation.
- Kirkland Lake is on the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of Cree, Ojibway, and Algonquin Peoples.
- Each community is home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

We recognize and appreciate the historic connection that Indigenous people have to these territories. We support their efforts to sustain and grow their nations. We also recognize the contributions that they have made in shaping and strengthening local communities, the province, and Canada.



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Author's calculations are based on data available at the time of publication and are therefore subject to change.

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About the Northern Analyst Collective

The Northern Analyst Collective, a project of Northern Policy Institute, will allow members to “time share” a professional policy analyst. By merging our collective resources we can ensure that the smallest municipality or local charity can access high-end skills at an affordable price.

About Northern Policy Institute

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent think tank. We perform research, collect and disseminate evidence, and identify policy opportunities to support the growth of sustainable Northern communities. Our operations are located in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, and Kirkland Lake. We seek to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts Northern Ontario, Ontario, and Canada as a whole.

NAC Partner



Sudbury Local Immigration Partnership

The Sudbury Local Immigration Partnership (SLIP) focuses on the development of different initiatives to ensure that Greater Sudbury continues to be a welcoming community for newcomers of all walks of life. The SLIP fosters an inclusive, engaging and collaborative environment with local stakeholders to identify issues, share solutions, build capacity and preserve collective memory for the purpose of ensuring the attraction, settlement, inclusion and retention of newcomers in the City of Greater Sudbury.

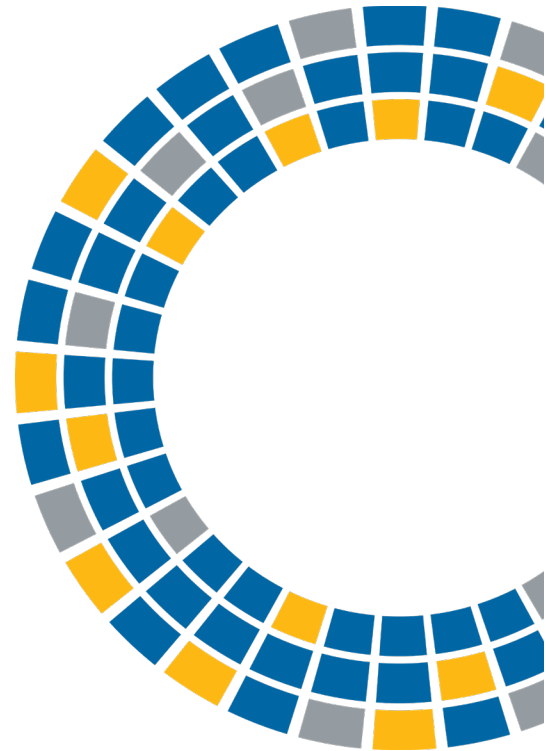


About the Author

Larissa Yantha



Larissa Yantha is a prior former analyst/NOHFC intern at Northern Policy Institute. During her BA in Global Studies and MA in Religion, Culture and Global Justice, she became interested in Indigenous capacity and innovation, immigration, and community-driven approaches to anti-racism. Larissa currently acts as the Special Projects Coordinator at the Municipality of West Nipissing where she applies her interdisciplinary knowledge and intersectional research approaches. When not buried in research, Larissa can be found in her hometown of Englehart, volunteering with local initiatives, and roaming Northern Ontario.



Notes

This case study is a part of a larger series of initiatives that analyze anti-racism and discrimination initiatives across Canada. Borne out of a partnership with Northern Policy Institute, this anti-discrimination and racism work is but one of several efforts the Sudbury Local Immigration Partnership is undertaking.

Please refer to the full report for other case studies and lessons that not only the City of Greater Sudbury can employ, but other communities across Ontario's northern regions as well.



Using Art as a Catalyst for Change

Glenherst Art Gallery of Brant

Srimoyee Mitra is a performance artist, curator, and writer. In 2008, she developed an art installation titled *Let's Talk, Get to Know Each Other Better, We Are All Human* at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Her projects have been included at conferences at the University of Toronto and in art galleries across Canada. Since 2008, she has worked at SAVAC (South Asian Visual Arts Centre) in Toronto (Mathur, DeGagné and Dewar 2011). She is of South Asian heritage and uses her experiences as an immigrant to Canada and her interest in socially relevant projects to engage with artists and audiences alike (STAMPS n.d.). The reserve locations reflected the realities of the times during the establishment of the reserves in the 1870s through to the 1920s. First Nations wanted reserves set aside within their traditional territories and in settings that had immediate utility as fishing or hunting grounds, were near trading posts, or were in areas with agricultural promise. For its part, the Government of Canada did not want First Nations peoples living near major centres, if this could be avoided, and hoped to reserve prime agricultural land for commercially minded non-Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, the reserves were allocated on the basis of 640 acres per family of five, although there were many examples of government officials undercounting the number of members eligible for inclusion—deliberately or through neglect. As a result, many of the reserves were too small from the outset and were not sufficient to accommodate growing First Nations populations.



The Initiative

In 2008, Mitra listened to the federal government's apology to the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples of Canada. She found it intriguing that the apology was framed as a simple binary between European settlers as the perpetrators and Indigenous peoples as the victims. In reality, Mitra says that the process for reconciliation must account for the multicultural reality of current Canadian society. Avoiding the facts of recent immigration and the mingling between the three demographics minimizes the responsibility that all non-Indigenous people in Canada should have over historic and ongoing racism against Indigenous peoples (Mathur, DeGagné and Dewar 2011).

Mitra wanted to explore how Indigenous peoples and newcomers co-exist and experience racism together (STAMPS n.d.). She felt it was important to use her work and personal locale as a South Asian curator in Canada to showcase her new understanding of society in an exhibition (Mathur, DeGagné and Dewar 2011). As such, she invited eight artists from Indigenous and South Asian backgrounds to create art based on their experiences of racism, loss, identity, and displacement. The exhibition took place in 2009 at the Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant, which is located on the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. This choice of location was strategic as it is located on the traditional territory of the Six Nations of the Grand River but it also happens to be home to a fast-growing population of South Asian migrants (Chung 2012). The exhibition was called *Crossing Lines: An Intercultural Dialogue*.

Successes & Achievements

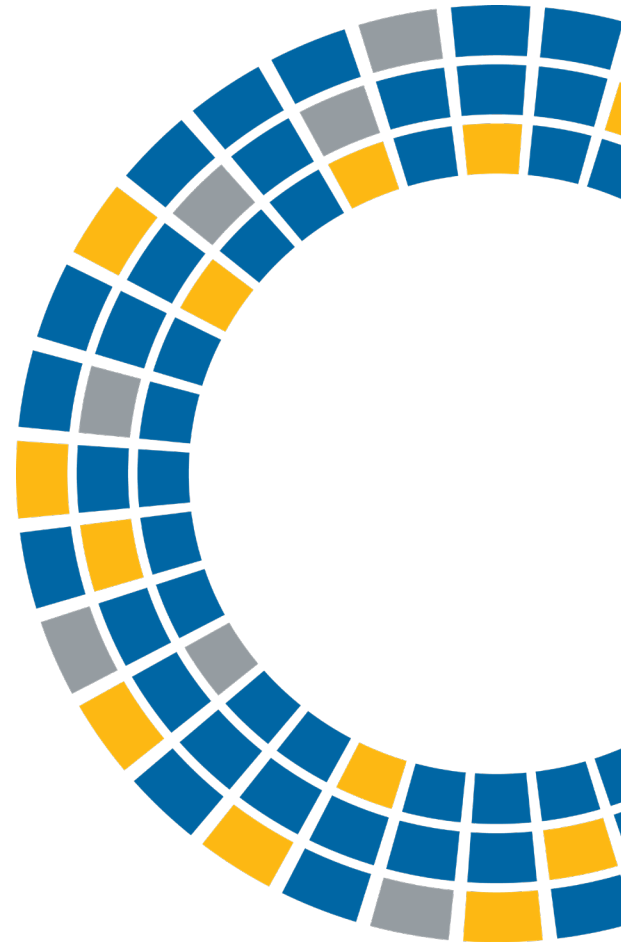
Mitra's project explored the possibility of building mutual understanding, trust, and solidarity among the local South Asian and Indigenous populations (Chung 2012). Her goal was to mount an exhibition that demonstrated the common themes and experiences of both groups, hoping that the attendees would learn something from the shared hardships represented in the art pieces. The event drew a significant regional audience, which was exposed to art that showed both pain and accomplishment from local artists. It promoted dialogue within, and arguably beyond, the context of the event.

The exhibition also prompted a sense of friendship and solidarity among the artists. Two of them, Indian filmmaker Ali Kazimi and Iroquois photographer Jeff Thomas, collaborated to reflect on Thomas' art while offering an autobiographical approach that revealed the filmmaker's history as a newcomer. Their collaboration prompted internal reflections about personal histories while also giving art enthusiasts a glance at the contradictions of 'Indianness.' The artists discovered that South Asians are often misidentified as being 'Indian' just as Indigenous peoples in Canada were historically labelled 'Indian' (Mathur, DeGagné and Dewar 2011). Mitra chose to project Kazimi's film in the same room and directly across from Thomas' large photographic print. This was intended to convey the importance of having ongoing cross-cultural dialogue.



Key Lessons

For some, art may be viewed as an unlikely catalyst for change, but in this case it created space for unorganized dialogue between unique demographics. In this sharing of art and dialogue, it was found that both demographics often experienced mislabeling and had similar experiences and histories of marginalization and colonization. Art forms were one way for each artist to reflect upon their own stories and barriers, and the exhibition ensured that they were able to share these reflections with community members who may be unaware of the discrimination that minorities and Indigenous peoples face. Additionally, art can offer a path toward healing. Collaborations between artists, and the exhibitions that are created from these new relationships, can lead to mending for newcomers and Indigenous peoples (Chung 2012). Art can lead to self-reflexivity and provide space for listening and learning, which are all necessary initial steps to understanding and preventing racism in such a diverse and growing community.



References

Chung, Melissa. "The Relationships Between Racialized Immigrants and Indigenous Peoples in Canada: A Literature Review." MA Thesis, Ryerson University, 2012.

Mathur, Ashok, Jonathan Dewar, and Mike DeGagné. Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011. <http://www.ahf.ca/downloads/cultivating-canada-pdf.pdf>.

STAMPS. "Srimoyee Mitra." People. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://stamps.umich.edu/people/detail/srimoyee_mitra#:~:text=Srimoyee%20Mitra%20is%20a%20curator,creative%20practices%20and%20public%20audiences.

About Northern Policy Institute

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Related Research

Addressing the Cuts Left Behind: Anti-Racism and Discrimination Initiatives for an Inclusive Northern Ontario

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