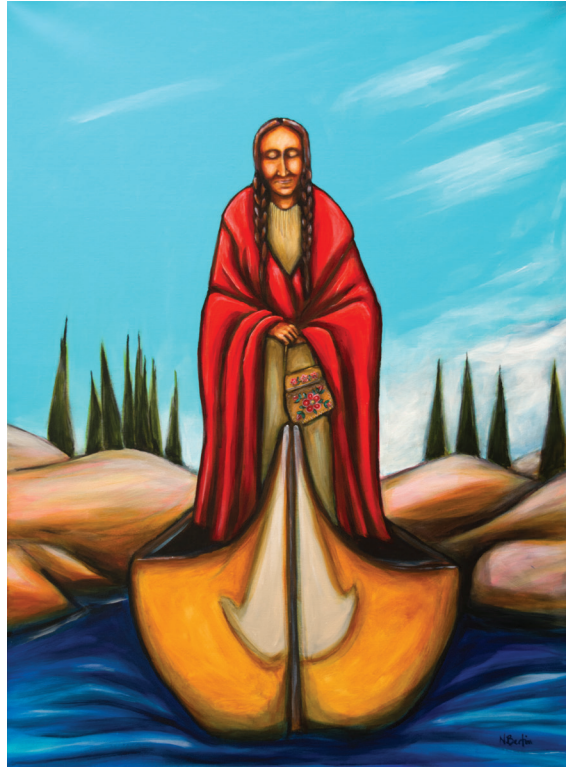


Nathalie Bertin



Nathalie Bertin, *In the Beginning: Assababich, Marie, Pierre* (Triptych), 2022, acrylic, 48" x 36" each. Images courtesy of the artist.



Nathalie Bertin

Nathalie Bertin is an author, educator, curator and multidisciplinary artist of Métis, French, Anishinaabe and Algonquin ancestry. She is a member of the Waawaashkeshi (Deer Clan). Recent exhibitions include *Unmasking the Pandemic: From Personal Protection to Personal Expression* at the Royal Ontario Museum (2021); *Breathe: 2nd Wave* at the Art Gallery of Guelph (2021); *Call to Action #83: A Reconciliation Project*, which travelled to Art Gallery of Northumberland, MacLaren Art Centre and the Aurora Cultural Centre, among other locations from 2017 to 2019; and *Warrior Women* at the Georgian Arts Centre & Gallery (2014), among others. *Loup Garou & Moccasins: A Story in Multi-Mediums* (2022) travels to Latcham Art Centre from Station Gallery (Whitby, ON), and draws from Bertin's book "Loup Garou, Moccasins & Métis Folklore", published in March 2020.

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ART CENTRE

Latcham Art Centre inspires the community to engage with visual art through exhibitions of contemporary art and education programs including classes, workshops, artist talks and tours. It is funded by donations, sponsorships, membership and fundraising events as well as annual grants from the municipality of Whitchurch-Stouffville and the Ontario Arts Council.

THIS EXHIBITION IS GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY:



Loup Garou & Moccasins: A Story in Multi-Mediums
Nathalie Bertin

"Whether to understand the nuances of Métis culture, or to enjoy my artistic style, or learn a little bit of Canadian history you wouldn't learn in schoolbooks, you are welcome to take it all in. *Loup Garou and Moccasins* is simply my story (so far) told in four parts."

Loup Garou & Moccasins: A Story in Multi-Mediums

Nathalie Bertin

Open: Friday, September 2 – Saturday, October 29, 2022

Reception: Friday, September 9, 2022 | 7 – 9 PM | Artist Talk: Tuesday, September 13 | 12 – 1:30 PM

Stories, so far.

Werewolves are not uncommon in Western pop culture and cinema, with contemporary film examples like *Underworld* (2003) and *Van Helsing* (2004) revisiting territory that *The Wolf Man* (1941) introduced sixty-three years earlier. The base ingredients of these stories, however, are rooted much further back in time, within European and, later, French-Canadian folklore. A loup-garou is a person who shapeshifts into a wolf or dog, but unlike today's werewolf, this less-violent creature's transformations are linked to morality rather than the full moon; impious individuals were thought of being at the highest risk of affliction for the curse.¹ In referencing this folkloric creature from her cultural background in the title of her exhibition, Franco-Métis artist Nathalie Bertin prepares guests to find an exhibition full of stories and complex ideas of identity.

Loup Garou & Moccasins: A Story in Multi-Mediums contains a diverse collection of works that use specific images and materials to reference personal stories from the artist's life, in addition to folklore and histories drawn from her Algonquin, French and Métis ancestry. These meticulous artworks are set within a contemporary and historical context, one where Métis communities find themselves negotiating and defending their identity among settlers and Indigenous people alike. This task, ongoing since before confederation, is one that Bertin quietly reminds viewers is unresolved today.

Beginning in the centre of the gallery, beaded moccushions—the artist's portmanteau term, combining the words moccasin and cushion—are presented on a ring of plinths. Each soft, dinnerplate-sized sculpture is embroidered and embellished with specific materials: deer hide, seeds, fish scales, glass and resin beads, various furs, and more. The plinth layout suggests how youngsters are called to sit around their teachers, caretakers, and elders to take in stories. "Stories are a part of childhood." Bertin writes in her artist statement. "In Ojibway and Métis tradition, stories are meant for entertainment, but also to instill practical knowledge."² In keeping with this idea, each moccushion was made in relation to a specific story, embedded with symbols and materials that evoke its narrative. The vibrant sculpture *Where Red Ochre Comes From* includes a small amount of pearlescent Delica beads that form the image of a flower. From in between its blue petals, resin claws stretch out onto a dyed red deer hide. At its circular margin, red and turquoise stones create the edging of a beaver pelt, which makes up the lining on the side of the object. While creating this, Bertin kept the story of red ochre in her mind, as told by Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau (1931-2007):

Long ago, when beavers were still really huge animals, they would take naps on Lake Superior in the middle of the afternoon. But they had to keep an eye out for clouds. Inside the clouds, there lived Thunder Birds. The Thunder Birds had large eyes they used to peek through the clouds to see below. If the Thunder Birds saw the Beaver sleeping on the water, they would sneak up on them from inside the clouds and grab them with their strong claws to eat them. The blood of the beaver would spill into the waters. Eventually, the blood would wash up to shore and stain the rocks red.³

Some moccushions tell foundational stories like these, which reflect on and extend the wider tradition of oral history in several Métis and Indigenous cultures throughout Turtle Island. These are passed down through generations and have the capacity to preserve identity, even in its evolving state, as they are carried forward within people.

Other moccushions reference stories that are much more personal to the artist. *Grandmothers*, found against the east wall of the gallery, incorporates quills, shells, ermine and deer hide, cotton, and sinew into the sculpture, but its key material is antique lacework, which covers the entire object and makes up its frilled edge. This doily was started by Bertin's great grandmother before the artist's birth and was gifted to her in an incomplete state after her great grandmother's passing. After she received the doily, Bertin decided to complete it in a way that "was led by her pattern," a process that allowed for a type of knowing: "this is how I learned about my great grandmother."⁴

On each side of *Grandmothers*, along the east and north walls of the gallery, Bertin's artwork honours key figures from her ancestry, many of which are women. The descriptive titles of each provide insight into the visual content: along the east wall, works entitled *Me and the Deer Clan Posse* and *Mémère et Grand Mémère* speak to Bertin's familial relations. Along the north wall, Bertin recognizes the life and lineage of Marie Miteouamegoukoue, an Indigenous woman from the Weskarani band of the Algonquin Nation. A narrative triptych called *In the Beginning* features her centrally, flanked by the known partners of her life: her first partner, Assababich, is on the left, with her second partner, Pierre Couc dit LaFleur, on the right. Her well-documented story chronicles a lifetime caught within the French and Iroquois Wars, a conflict that affected neighbouring nations like that of the Algonquin people. In 1652, these wars claimed the life of Assababich and saw their two children captured by Iroquois forces, who were intent on expanding their hunting territory and becoming the sole provider of profitable furs to French and Dutch traders. After a time of mourning for her family, she partnered with Pierre Couc dit LaFleur and raised nine more children. To the right of *In the Beginning* rests a solemn moccushion adorned with red beaded petals on a black fabric base. This acts as a memorial piece for the couple's eldest daughter, Jeanne, who was also captured, tortured, and killed.⁵ For some people of Métis and Indigenous ancestry, looking back on Marie Miteouamegoukoue's family story, as fraught as it may be, can be characterized as one of endurance, strength, and resilience in the face of violence and adversity.

Along the south wall of the gallery are photo-essays that show views of the artist's daily life throughout the seasons. The images in each are photographed separately before being digitally collaged together and printed. The configurations show painted and beaded artwork that Bertin has made alongside images of the land, plants, animals, and food. Principal among them are images of the landscape near Bertin's home and studio, located in so-called Bonfield, ON, within Omàmiwininiwag (Algonquin) territory. Located just forty minutes south-east is Algonquin Park; those that have visited may know about the wolves and coyotes that make their home in the area. In 2021, the artist spoke to an ecologist for Ontario Parks, Alison Lake, who revealed that her fellow staff and biologists had fresh interest in the creatures because of newly observed behaviours and unexpected discoveries related to their DNA:

"Within the larger discussion, we talked about observed behaviours and interesting DNA discoveries where some wolves—[that] looked like wolves and acted like wolves—had full coyote DNA, and coyotes —[that] looked and acted like coyotes—had wolf DNA. In some cases, they found coyotes with coyote DNA behaved like wolves, and so on for the wolves acting like coyotes... Apparently, naming these creatures has become a huge point of contention among these biologists. Are they wolves because they have wolf DNA or because they behave like wolves?"⁶

The question about identity that Bertin asks here can be understood in an expanded sense, too, beyond the specific desires of biologists looking at wolf and coyote DNA. It reveals a tendency towards classification and discrete compartmentalization that can be limiting or harmful when applied to examinations of culture and human identity. It is a question of being enough that, within a national context, people of Métis and Indigenous heritage regularly contend with from the wider population. *My Fate as a Bridge*—hung on the west wall—hints at this with its title, and then makes the thought explicit with the incorporated words "Mais pour qui et ce qu'elle se prend a courir dans le bois comme ça et de faire la chasse? Une sauvagesse Indienne?" (But who does she think she is running around in the woods like that and hunting? An Indian savage?). The desire to compartmentalize sets up a system where there is little room for grey areas, which is at odds with how cultures and identities develop and grow over time. But what the timeline in Bertin's exhibition quietly makes plain—by mapping centuries old folklore and histories and connecting them to Bertin's life today—is that Métis culture is not a monolith that appeared overnight, and it is more than an assumed 50/50 mixture of Indigenous and European/settler ancestry. It is a distinct culture on its own that has grown and evolved, with nuance being found within different Métis communities and families.

-Tyler Durbano

1 Nancy Schmitz, and Clayton Ma, "Loup-Garou," The Canadian Encyclopedia (Historica, March 12, 2007), <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/loup-garou>.

2 From Nathalie Bertin's artist statement, submitted for *Loup Garou & Moccasins: A Story in Multi-Mediums*

3 From Nathalie Bertin's artist statement on *Where Red Ochre Comes From*

4 Bertin, Nathalie. *Loup Garou, Moccasins and Métis Folklore*. Illustrated version, Victoria, British Columbia, Tellwell Talent, 2020. From "Grandmothers (Moccushion #10)"

5 Author unknown, "Marie Miteouamegoukoue and Pierre Couc-Lafleur— Founders of a Legacy," Ontario Métis Family Records Center (Ontario Métis Family Records Center, March 18, 2018), <https://omfrc.org/2018/03/marie-miteouamegoukoue-pierre-couc-lafleur-founders-legacy/>.

6 Nathalie Bertin. Excerpt from her artist statement, submitted for *Loup Garou & Moccasins: A Story in Multi-Mediums*

