

# Anchored to Earth by Starlight: Decolonizing Relationship to Sky

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**Annette S. Lee**

**Abstract.** The brilliance of the night sky has inspired and intrigued humanity throughout all time, all civilizations, all cultures. It is woven into our survival and vibrancy – mind, body, heart, and spirit – as the human species. The sky transcends space, connecting us to other worlds like a portal. Sky transcends time, connecting us two-legged across past, present, and future.

And yet because of the history of colonization, most people in the US who look up at the stars see and know only one system. This single story has been promoted as the only story and is rooted in Western European cultures or the so called ‘Greek system’ of constellations and cosmological philosophies.

Presented here will be an overview of an art installation called ‘Anchored to Earth by Starlight – Decolonizing Night Sky’ which is part of a group show called ‘Indigenous Survivance’ (St. John’s University, Art Center Gallery, Collegeville, Minnesota, Aug. 29 through Oct. 29, 2022). The multi-layered experiential exhibit features: a cinematic large-scale project embedded with spoken word art, a series of celestial-terrestrial mixed media paintings, and Indigenous star maps. All work is centred around rebuilding relationship with sky.

The hope is that in some way this work helps us to change our relationship with the sky, stars, and people. We are often led to believe that maps are subjective and full of facts, but in truth maps are filled with the bias of the map-maker. Decolonization means pulling back the superficial layer and acknowledging the present as a moment in a wave of time that is intricately linked to past and future. Just as an anchor keeps a ship grounded and centred, relationship to night sky gives us hope, strength, and purpose in these challenging times.

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[www.CultureAndCosmos.org](http://www.CultureAndCosmos.org)

## 1. Introduction

I used to look up and see the Greek constellations, like the Big Dipper or Leo the lion... but now I know that there are stars up there that are ours. It does something to me inside, to have that relationship with the stars. It's like finding a long-lost relative. *Jeffrey Tibbetts (Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe), 2010.*<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 1. Close up of Miishi Bizhiw (Great Panther), 'Ojibwe Giizhiig Anung Masinaaigan - Ojibwe Star Sky Paper', Painting by Annette S. Lee, William Wilson, and Carl Gawboy, *Ojibwe Giizhiig Anung Masinaaigan - Ojibwe Star Sky Paper*, c. 2012, Mixed media on paper, 36 x 36", 2012.

What is it about the night sky that is so beautiful, so intriguing that human beings are hard-wired to look up? Do animals stargaze? Or is this a uniquely human endeavour? Given this instinctual, perpetual connection to sky as a species, why is it that one culture has dominated our human connection to sky in the twenty-first century? The simple answer is

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Tibbetts, participant of a Native Skywatchers workshop, personal communication, 2010.

colonization. In Fall of 2022, the work of artist-scientist Annette S. Lee, was exhibited as one of the five Indigenous artists in a group show called 'Indigenous Survivance'. The following is an excerpt from the exhibit overview<sup>2</sup>:

The term survivance, which has elements of survival and resistance, was first referenced in the context of Native American Studies by White-Earth author Gerald Vizenor in his book *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*.<sup>3</sup> Native art, in any form, is an act of survivance. It tells a story, a story of resilience and adaptability, that not only says Native people are still here, but will always be present and represented in the fabric of American life.

The exhibit was curated by Travis Zimmerman, a descendent of the Crane Clan of the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Travis is a veteran of the United States Army and Minnesota National Guard. For the past fifteen years, he has been the Site Manager of the Mille Lacs Indian Museum, which is part of the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS). Involved with numerous American Indian organizations in Minnesota and the region for the past thirty years... Indigenous Survivance is an art exhibit that highlights some of the work of a number of Minnesota's premiere Native artists. Vibrant works, in a number of mediums, tell the story of native people drawing on traditional wisdom and knowledge to impact contemporary issues and movements. Lakota and Ojibwe artists, Annette S. Lee, Steve Promo, Laura Youngbird, Pat Kruse, and Jonathan Thunder share their works to educate others about what it means to be Native and inspire a whole new generation of Native artists to create art for continued Indigenous Survivance.

Gallery Manager, Becky Pflueger explains, 'The exhibition Indigenous Survivance sprang from a campus wide call for more diversity and inclusion within the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University. The exhibition asks the question, "what does it mean to be a Native and Indigenous artist today?"' Consisting of five visual artists and curated by

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<sup>2</sup> Travis Zimmerman, 'Indigenous Survivance,' College of Saint Benedict & Saint John's University, August 2022, <https://www.csbsju.edu/fine-arts/visual-arts/indigenous-survivance>.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Robert Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* [Bison books ed] (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

Travis Zimmerman, the exhibition was a collaboration between the department of Fine Arts Programing, Gallery Manager Becky Pflueger, Faculty member Dr Ted Gordon, and the Indigenous Student Association. Becky and Travis worked together to bring artists of various backgrounds from across the state of Minnesota. Lasting over 60 days, the exhibition brought over 800 viewers to the St. John's University galleries. The exhibition was widely praised by many gallery visitors.

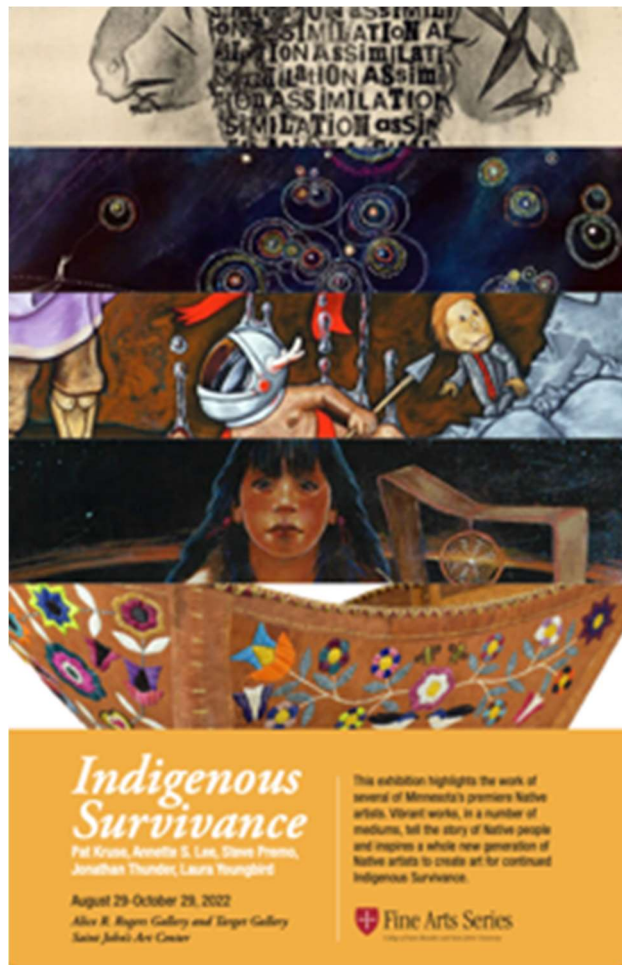


Fig. 2. Exhibit Postcard, 'Indigenous Survivance', by Becky Pflueger, 5 x 7", Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022.

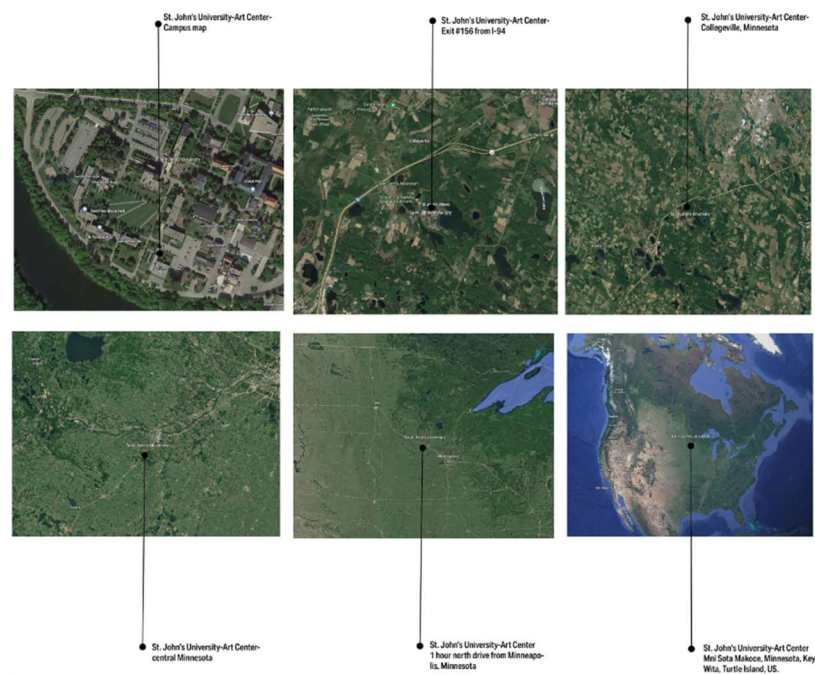


Fig. 3. Single page from Concept Deck: Site Visit & Location, 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight'. Design by Annette S. Lee, for group exhibit 'Indigenous Survivance'. Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022, <https://annettelee.com/index.php/portfolio/indigenous-survivance/>

This article focuses on the development and design strategy of the exhibit created by Annette S. Lee called 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight', an experiential art installation that was featured in the group show 'Indigenous Survivance' curated by Travis Zimmerman in collaboration with Gallery Manager Rebecca Pflueger at the Art Center Gallery, located on the campus of St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota.<sup>4</sup> The title of the exhibit, 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight', comes from a digital narrative short film called 'First Memory' created by A. Lee in Spring

<sup>4</sup> Annette S. Lee, 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight', Indigenous Survivance, 2022, Multisensory experiential art installation, 16' x 26', 2022. <https://annettelee.com/index.php/portfolio/indigenous-survivance/>.

2021.<sup>5</sup> The quote from the script reads, ‘I was anchored to Earth by Starlight’ and it appears at (1:33) in the audio of the digital production.

## 2. Problem Statement

How do we as Indigenous people and as human being begin to peel back the layers of colonization, a human tragedy that is still playing out today? How do we ultimately heal and move forward? One way to begin is to engage in critical conversations of the history and historical trauma of colonization, for example boarding schools. We acknowledge the importance of native identity, traditional ways of knowing, and revitalize Indigenous languages. We make art.

Travis explains the inspiration for the exhibit,

I was so lucky as a kid I grew up on mooz (Ojibwe word for ‘moose’) meat... we would hang the head of the mooz in the tree.. and bury the head in the dirt... I used to make knives out of the mooz leg bones... The mooz is something I connect to and have been connected to all my life. It was neat listening to the mooz stories and the constellations...

Having graduated from Saint John’s University in 1994, Travis explains the motivation for the show,

That’s really how the art show came about was because of the work that St. Johns and St. Ben’s has been doing the last couple of years in really trying to reconcile their histories and the role they played in boarding schools... not only was St. John’s originally a boarding school, but St. Ben’s was also a boarding school for Indian children... they’ve been struggling with that and thinking about what they could do. The last couple of years the Indian student association and a Native American task force were formed which is made up of some of the administrators, some students, some professors, some native community around St. Cloud. We presented the president with the history and ideas we had for reconciliation, repairing the harm, repatriation, and ideas like that...’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Annette S. Lee, *First Memory*, May 2021, Digital Story Art, May 2021, [https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/548091128?embedded=true&source=video\\_title&owner=54519943](https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/548091128?embedded=true&source=video_title&owner=54519943).

<sup>6</sup> Travis Zimmerman, Native Skywatchers Fall Equinox Event, interview by Annette S. Lee, video, digital content, September 2022,

Travis explains what one elder shared with him about the boarding school trauma, 'It was so quiet after the kids left.' He adds, '...a traumatic experience, whole generations of Indian parents that no longer had children to parent. It has had lasting impacts'.<sup>7</sup>



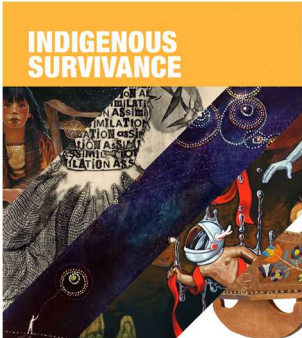
Fig. 4. Photo of curator of 'Indigenous Survivance' exhibit, Travis Zimmerman, Mille Lacs Reservation, photo by T. Zimmerman, Minnesota, US, 2022.

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[https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/777718085/94e96acee7?embedded=true&source=vimeo\\_logo&owner=54519943](https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/777718085/94e96acee7?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=54519943).

<sup>7</sup> Zimmerman.

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**INDIGENOUS SURVIVANCE**

**August 29 – October 29, 2022**  
**Reception: September 8th 5-7 p.m.**  
**Alice R. Rogers Gallery and Target Gallery**  
**Saint John's Art Center**

Indigenous Survivance is an art exhibit curated by Travis Zimmerman '94, that highlights the work of five of Minnesota's premiere Native artists. Vibrant works, in a number of mediums, tell the story of Native people, drawing on traditional wisdom and knowledge to impact contemporary issues and movements. Lakota and Ojibwe artists Pat Kruse, Annette S. Lee, Steve Premo, Laura Youngbird and Jonathan Thunder share their works to educate others about what it means to be Native and to inspire a whole new generation of Native artists to create art for continued Indigenous Survivance.

**CONNECT**  
**TOPICS AND THEMES THIS PERFORMANCE ENGAGES WITH:**

- Native Identity
- Boarding Schools
- Traditional Knowledge
- Cultural Reclamation
- Historical Trauma
- Storytelling
- Live Courageously
- Think Deeply
- Embrace Difference

**ONLINE RESOURCES**

National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/about-us/>  
 IllumNATIVE <https://illuminative.org/>  
 NativeHope <https://blog.nativehope.org/understanding-historical-trauma-and-native-americans>  
<https://www.csbsju.edu/news/native-nations-task-force>  
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchives/id/11803/rec/4>

**ENGAGE**

American Indian tribes have struggled to define who is Indian throughout United States history. The same can be said about what makes Native American art expressly Native.

- How does art in this exhibit differ or resemble other representations that you have seen of Native Americans?
- When you hear the words "American Indian Art", what comes to mind?
- Has your perception of Indian Art changed after viewing this exhibit?

On the outside of the gallery is an acknowledgment of the Native Nations that lived in the area where CSB and SJU campuses are located today.

- Beyond acknowledgments, how can institutions and governments begin to repair the harm that has been inflicted on Native communities and the historical trauma that has been passed down from generation to generation?

What role can art play in the healing process? American Indians use storytelling to pass on traditions and knowledge of history and culture.

- What stories are being told through the art in the exhibit?
- How is traditional knowledge reflected in the art?
- Why do you think Travis selected these artists to highlight in the exhibit? What story is he telling through the exhibition?

The colleges of CSB and SJU operated boarding schools and are working to not only acknowledge, but also understand the impacts that these schools had on Native communities. Some of the art displayed speaks directly to the topic of boarding schools, while other pieces indirectly talk about the effects boarding schools had on Indian families. Think about how your life would be different if generations of your ancestors' attended schools where they were forbidden to speak their own language. Their history and culture were dismissed, accomplishments and contributions they made to the history of the world were purposely ignored? What if they were also told they could not practice their religion or way of life any longer?

- Do you think your current situation would be the same?
- Do you think you would value education as much if it ignored everything about who you are and who your ancestors were?

Fig. 5. 'Indigenous Survivance' Academic Guide, written by T. Zimmerman, Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022.  
<https://www.csbsju.edu/fine-arts/visual-arts/past-exhibitions-2022-23/indigenous-survivance>.

The Indigenous Survivance Academic Guide further engages audience members of the exhibit to think deeply about native identity and historical trauma.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, the exhibit aims to challenge perceptions of Native American artists and how the viewer's perception might have changed after engaging with the exhibit. Speaking to the more recent practice of land acknowledgements that some cultural institutions have adopted as a sign of diversity and inclusivity, the curator, T. Zimmerman challenges everyone to think about this more deeply. 'How can institutions and governments begin to repair the harm that has been inflicted on Native communities and the historical trauma that has been passed down from generation to generation?' Most relevant here the inquiry continues beyond the superficial to ask the viewer, 'What role can art play in the healing process?' This is an essential question that is immensely relevant to our current demography. According to the Pew Research Center in 2016 there

<sup>8</sup> Zimmerman, 'Indigenous Survivance'.



were more babies of color born than white babies,<sup>9</sup> and sometime around 2040 there will be a need for new definitions of terms as the US will become majority minority.<sup>10</sup> How do communities and individuals heal? The educator guide ask very directly,

Think about how your life would be different if generations of your ancestors' attended schools where they were forbidden to speak their own language. Their history and culture were dismissed, accomplishments and contributions they made to the history of the world were purposely ignored? What if they were told they could not practice their religion or way of life any longer?... Do you think your current situation would be the same? Do you think you would value education as much if it ignored everything about who you are and who your ancestors were?<sup>11</sup>

This direct, honest, line of personal inquiry is exactly the kind of deep, critical, interrogation that many artists participate in on a regular basis.

How does this relate to my contribution to the larger exhibit? My work in general exists at the intersection of art, science, and culture. Of particular interest in this exhibit, 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight – Decolonizing Relationship to Sky', are star maps. Celestial cartography has a long history of weaving together the unknown and the know, there has always been artistry alongside the utility. What some people are not aware of is the cultural biases that are inherit in any map, especially when it comes to something as marvelous as the night sky.

Think about what maps are... They are abstractions of a place, usually with a functional, practical purpose but also demanding visuals. Maps are tools of visual communication, that intend to bring organization and measure to the 'real world'. Maps are in a way portals, trusted routes into the unknown. The map is perceived by many as representing only the facts but in reality maps convey strategy. In the abstraction choices are made, visual hierarchies are required. Formal elements of color, form, composition, font, shape all involve choices that are loaded with cultural

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<sup>9</sup> D'Vera Cohn, 'It's Official: Minority Babies Are the Majority among the Nation's Infants, but Only Just,' *Pew Research Center*, June 23, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/23/its-official-minority-babies-are-the-majority-among-the-nations-infants-but-only-just/>.

<sup>10</sup> H. Frey, *Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics Are Remaking America* (Brookings Institute Press, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Zimmerman, 'Indigenous Survivance.'

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signs and political realities. Empires used maps to communicate their territory, to defend the lines and to collect taxes. Early European maps of constellations and cosmological views were made and disseminated in the 1600s and 1700s. Examples like ‘Celestial map’<sup>12</sup> and ‘Scutum Constellation’<sup>13</sup> are dense with a network of assumptions and values. Political statements of dominance and technological superiority as well as naming in the ‘newly discovered’ objects in the southern skies. Celestial maps were glorious propaganda as well as utilitarian works of art.



Fig. 6. Frederik deWit, *Celestial Map*, 1670, ink on paper; print, 1670. Transferred from en.wikipedia to Commons. Scanned by Janke, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Planisph%C3%A6ri\\_c%C5%93leste.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Planisph%C3%A6ri_c%C5%93leste.jpg).

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<sup>12</sup> Frederik deWit, *Celestial Map*, 1670, ink on paper; print, 1670. Transferred from en.wikipedia to Commons. Scanned by Janke, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Planisph%C3%A6ri\\_c%C5%93leste.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Planisph%C3%A6ri_c%C5%93leste.jpg).

<sup>13</sup> Johannes Hevelius, *Scutum Constellation from Uranographia*, 1690, 1690, *Atlas Coelestis*. Johannes Hevelius drew the constellation in *Uranographia*, his celestial catalogue in 1690., [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scutum\\_Sobiescianum.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scutum_Sobiescianum.PNG).



Fig. 7. Johannes Hevelius, *Scutum Constellation from Uranographia*, 1690, 1690, Atlas Coelestis. Johannes Hevelius drew the constellation in *Uranographia*, his celestial catalogue in 1690.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scutum\\_Sobiescianum.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scutum_Sobiescianum.PNG).

The twentieth century French philosopher and cultural critic J. Baudrillard felt strongly that visual cultural had become so good at distorting the 'objective truth' of physical reality with its seemingly harmless representation, that there is increasing mass confusion on 'what is real'.

For example, consider a common tool like a clock, a calendar, or a map. Baudrillard points out the conundrum in modern society ...the map has become more real than the actual physical land (i.e., the territory). He states, 'The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory'.<sup>14</sup> He called this strange backwards perversion of truth or visual vertigo, 'the precession of simulacra' where simulacra is the abstraction that has taken over the real.<sup>15</sup> Our twenty-first century post-modern society is marked for a breakdown

<sup>14</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation (Simulacres et Simulation)* (Paris, France: Galilee, 1981),

[https://monoskop.org/images/9/90/BAUDRILLARD\\_Jean\\_-\\_1981\\_-\\_Simulacres\\_et\\_simulation.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/9/90/BAUDRILLARD_Jean_-_1981_-_Simulacres_et_simulation.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Baudrillard; Jean Baudrillard, *THE EVIL DEMON OF IMAGES*, 1984.

in truth itself in what some folks are calling ‘post-truth society’. Is there even such a thing as ‘truth’ anymore? Indeed, maps are powerful players in visual and material culture. Maps are considered by most sources of ‘truth’ in a sea of mass communication and mass consumerism.

In this exhibit, Annette’s work brings to focus two Indigenous star maps, ‘Ojibwe Giizhiig Anung Masinaaigan - Ojibwe Star Sky Paper’<sup>16,17</sup> and ‘D(L)akota Makoce Wicāḡhpi Wowapi-Sky Star Map’,<sup>18,19</sup> that were created over a decade ago (2012) as a way to visually communicate and explore other cultural perspectives of sky based on the Indigenous Knowledge Systems of the Ojibwe and D(L)akota peoples. This new work involves the mapping of a more personal relationship to sky in the form of large-scale projection and place-based, real-time celestial art practices. As maps, especially star maps, hold narratives of power, this exhibit encompasses both motifs, the practical and the metaphysical. This exhibit, ‘Anchored to Earth by Starlight – Decolonizing Relationship to Sky’, challenges the viewer to question cultural biases of ‘ownership’ and relationship to sky, and consider the night sky as dense with both mystery and clarity. The design challenge here was simply, how do we decolonize our relationship with sky?’ and what role might art play in the healing process?

### 3. Solution

The conceptual solution to the design challenge was to create an experiential night sky installation using both traditional and digital methods because the Indigenous relationship to sky demands a meaningful, interactive space. Recall that from an Indigenous perspective, as human beings, we are earth and sky. For example, the very name of the state of Minnesota has been appropriated from the Dakota phrase, Mni Sota Makoce, which Chris Mato Nunpa translates as, this is the ‘land where the

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<sup>16</sup> Lee, Wilson, and Gawboy, *Ojibwe Giizhiig Anung Masinaaigan - Ojibwe Star Sky Paper*.

<sup>17</sup> Annette S. Lee, ‘Native Skywatchers Ojibwe Star Map - Building Community Around Native Star Knowledge’, in *Astronomical Society of the Pacific-Communicating Science, Conference Series*, ed. Jonathan Barnes et al., vol. 473-Communicating Science (San Jose, CA, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Annette S. Lee and Jim Rock, *D(L)akota Makoce Wicāḡhpi Wowapi-Sky Star Map*, 2012, Mixed media on paper, 36 x 36’, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Annette S. Lee and Jim Rock, ‘Native Skywatchers and the Makoce Wicāḡhpi Wowapi—D(L)Akota Star Map—Building Community Around Native Star Knowledge’, 2015, 15.

waters reflects the skies or heavens'.<sup>20</sup> It relates to the fundamental philosophy of 'we come from the stars'. Stated by Chief Arvol Looking Horse, 'We came here as a spirit, from Star Nation, and then we get done, we go back... The Star Knowledge is like a mirror... the stars up there, and we have the stars down here...'<sup>21</sup> The connecting bridge between the spirit world and here is the Wanaği Tačanġku, Road of the Spirits or the Milky Way. And the D(L)akota word for this twin relationship or pairing of Earth and Sky is 'kapemni'.<sup>22,23</sup> In this one word an entire cosmological philosophy is contained, but to oversimplify it has been translated as, 'As it is Above; It is Below' and speaks directly to this critical Indigenous-based world-view of a mirrored relationship between Earth and Sky. Expressed here in the Hawaiian proverb, 'He lani I luna, he honus I lalo'. – literally, 'Sky above, Earth below', conveying a meaning of security and confidence as translated by Larry Kimura: 'Wherever I go, I travel with my sky and earth, and that is because my cultural roots to my place assures me of who and what I am'.<sup>24</sup> To reiterate this critical point, there three essential parts: (1) the above or sky; (2) the below, or earth; and (3) our human participation.

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<sup>20</sup> Chris Mato Nunpa, Chris Mato Nunpa Mni Sota Makoce, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOQsSajHIz8>.

<sup>21</sup> Arvol Looking Horse presents... 'Wichanpi Oyate, video recording (Green Grass, South Dakota, US: Native Skywatchers, 2021), <https://vimeo.com/598388197/3b5dc1bab8>.

<sup>22</sup> Annette S. Lee, Jim Rock, and Charlene O'Rourke, 'Much of the D(L)Akota Star Knowledge Rests on the Framework of Mirroring, Which Is Said, 'As It Is above (in the Sky), It Is below (on the Earth).' Kapemni – Can Mean Swinging around, Twisting, or Mirroring in D(L)Akota Which Is Drawn by Two Tipis/Triangles Connected at Their Apexes. The Inverted Top Tipi Symbolizes the Sky/Star World. The Lower Tipi Symbolizes the Earth/Physical World That We See around Us. At the Apex Where the Two Worlds/Tipis Meet Is a Doorway. When D(L/N)Akota People on Earth Mirror What Is Happening in the Stars, a Spiritual Doorway Opens up Because of This Connection. It Is Understood That the Healing Power of the Star Nation, 'the Woniya of Wakan Tanka', Flows Through.,' in *D(L)Akota Star Map Constellation Guidebook: An Introduction to D(L)Akota Star Knowledge*, P. 2 (Minneapolis, MN: Native Skywatchers Press, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Albert White Hat Sr., 'Kapemni-As it is above; it is below', presentation at Washington University, circa 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Larry Kimura, Hawaiian proverb, personal communication, 14 June 2021.

### 3.1. Methods

The exhibit ‘Anchored to Earth by Starlight – Decolonizing Relationship to Sky’, is part of the group show, ‘Indigenous Survivance’ that occurred at the art gallery space on the St. John’s campus fall 2022. Annette S. Lee designed an experiential art installation that had five main features: a large-scale digital projection, Indigenous star map tapestries, a series of mixed media paintings, celestial mini-maps, and a stillness bench. The location plan for this exhibit was focused on the Target Gallery inside the larger gallery designed specifically for immersive, digital art 16 x 26’ with controlled lighting.

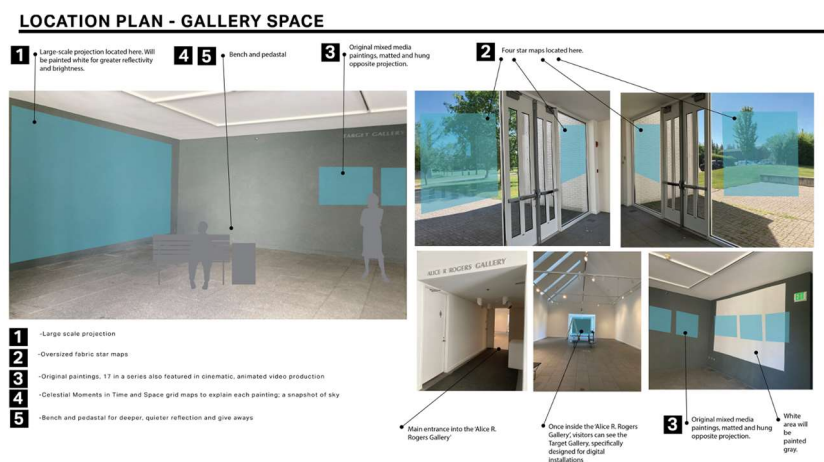


Fig. 8. Single page from Concept Deck: Location Plan – Gallery Space ‘Anchored to Earth by Starlight’. Design by Annette S. Lee, for group exhibit ‘Indigenous Survivance’. Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022, <https://annettelee.com/index.php/portfolio/indigenous-survivance/>.

### 3.2. Outcomes:

This exhibit has five experiential features which are described and explained in more detail here. Feature 1 is a Series of Mixed media paintings. Here is a statement written by the artist,

As a visual artist and an astronomer, I have always had a passion and personal relationship with the sky. To be clear, I was born into this world with a clear living memory of connection with the stars. This was further evidenced in many years of a repeating spirit dream related to the stars. Eventually imagery inspired by the dreamings became the focus of my visual work. During the beginning of the

covid-19 pandemic, I began a series of mixed media paintings on paper called 'Birth Memories During Covid' directly related to my relationship with the stars during the ongoing challenges'.<sup>25</sup> Each of the seventeen paintings is 10" x 22" on paper with a four-inch matte. Mixed media includes watercolor, acrylic, pen, pencil, and ink.



Fig. 9. Closeup, 'Remembering Star Relatives During Covid Winter, Annette S. Lee, Mixed Media on Paper, 10x22". Minnesota, US, Feb. 2021.

Feature 2 is a large-scale projection mapping. Upon entering the gallery space the viewer is drawn into the room by a large-scale projection on the left wall measuring 16x9'. The digital narrative is built on a 22-minute loop featuring a mixed media cinematic short (4:13) entitled 'First Memory'.<sup>26</sup> This story-based digital production was made in 2021 and combines cinematic footage with seventeen of the mixed media paintings created during the first two years of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Presented here is the script of the video short:

There I was in a large open field at night with a crowd of strangers all standing around doing nothing when suddenly the sky started exploding. Like fireworks of every color bathed in aurora --- the stars were dancing. No longer pin-points of ordered sparkle, but out

<sup>25</sup> Annette S. Lee, BIRTH MEMORIES DURING COVID, 2021 2020, Series of Mixed media paintings on paper, 10 x 22', 2021 2020, <https://annettelee.com/index.php/portfolio/birth-memories-during-covid-2021/>.

<sup>26</sup> Lee, First Memory.

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of control, swirling, interacting, trails of falling light. The sky was on fire... eerie yet beautiful.

All the people around me went hysterical. Surely it was the end. They grabbed their boxes and bags...photos even TVs. As if their earthly treasures could save them from this un-earthly moment. Mom's grabbed their children dragging them. Some fell to the ground. Some were trampled. All agreed, it was hopeless.

I stood like a statue, raised one hand skyward and reached. The celestial light grabbed me. As if it were a magnetic rope, an umbilical cord of energy, holding me in place in this violent storm. I was anchored to earth by starlight.

It filled me. Bathed me in calm confidence, I knew that the scene unfolding in the sky above marked a new beautiful beginning, a dreaming solidifying. I knew everything would truly be ok. Feeling bad for everyone else, I broke the connection. I tried to help them, to tell them it would be ok. No use. No one's listening. I went back to my starlight recharge.

Later, I understood that this was more than a Spirit Dream; it was my First Memory... like a message in a bottle made while still in the womb, sent through the doorway with me, so I would not forget. That's why every night, I visit with the stars... reach skyward, and remember the message ... 'The Star Medicine is strong and real in you. It is your lifeline. Don't forget!'

Today headlines: "A year of crisis & uncertainty",... a friend's 35-yr. old niece dies of covid, a family member so weak he can hardly hold up his head. Taking the vaccine allows a copy of messenger RNA from a deadly virus to be gene-edited into my cells... do I trust this...what choice do I have? I have no room for error.

Working 16-hr days, every day, it is all a blur of pain and silver linings. Time is spinning. Terrified for the future, feeling beaten down in the present. More grey hairs every day, jolting leg cramps wake me from a healing sleep, stomach gurgling like a blender grinding metal... I feel the stress overloading my body.



At this desperate moment, I reach skyward and inward like never before...holding on to my last hope, my Lifeline, my First Memory.  
*Annette S. Lee, 'First Memory', Spring 2021.*<sup>27</sup>

Further description is given in the artist's notes:

As stated here, my personal connection to the sky has always been about a living memory and practice that has fueled a lifelong connection to the stars. The most powerful and meaningful statement of the narrative script was then used for the title for a touring experiential art installation called, 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight'. This phrase 'I was anchored to Earth by Starlight' clearly and powerfully states my personal relationship to the stars. It speaks of the pure chaos and hopelessness that was unfolding in the crowd of people around me, as I stood holding and being energized by a non-material but very real connection to the stars as they danced and exploded above me. Just as an anchor keeps a ship grounded and centered, relationship to night sky gives me hope, strength, and purpose in these chaotic and challenging times. In this way the star medicine is my lifeline, my anchor.

In addition to the digital story art narrative the projection includes audio-visual animation of each painting's process and source celestial objects or mini maps. This is place-based, anchored in real-time, and includes a mixture of Ojibwe, D(L)akota, and Greek constellation references. It references directly whatever important event that is happening in the sky and on the land at that time and date. The process of doing art in this way is a manifestation of Kapemni. It is the next level of relationship to sky.

Here is an example of one of the paintings and the associated animation that shows a clear decolonizing of relationship to sky that is both personal and astronomically accurate. Shown in the painting are a series of circles. The largest circle placed in the center of the layout might be seen as representing the Sun, but in fact upon closer inspection it is the shape of the coronavirus or Covid-19. The Sun is located to the right with long rays emanating outwards radially. Below the Sun is Mercury shown as a crescent. As in the title, the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn is shown in the center. It was called the 'Great' conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, also

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<sup>27</sup> Lee.

called the 'Christmas Star' because the two bright planets were less than one-tenth of a degree apart, appearing as one pinpoint of light from the ground view.<sup>28</sup> The sky was full at this time due to Ikwe' Anung (Venus) setting in the west in front of Sun and Mercury. Dibik Giizis (Moon) and Mars are seen rising in the east or to the left in the painting. All seven luminaries are present.



Fig. 10. 'Jupiter and Saturn Dance Together'. Painting by Annette S. Lee, Mixed Media on Paper, 10x 22", Minnesota, US, Dec. 2020.

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<sup>28</sup> Bill Keeter, 'NASA - The 'Great' Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn', Text, NASA, December 15, 2020, <http://www.nasa.gov/feature/the-great-conjunction-of-jupiter-and-saturn>.



Fig. 11. Close up showing Mercury (lower left center) and Sun (upper right center), taken from 'Jupiter and Saturn Dance Together'. Painting by Annette S. Lee, Mixed Media on Paper, 10x 22. Minnesota, US, Dec. 2020.

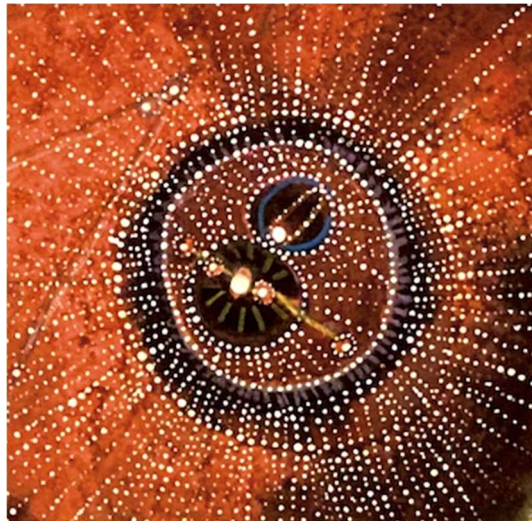


Fig. 12. Close up showing Jupiter (lower left center) and Saturn (upper right center), taken from 'Jupiter and Saturn Dance Together'. Painting by Annette S. Lee, Mixed Media on Paper, 10x 22". Minnesota, US, Dec. 2020.

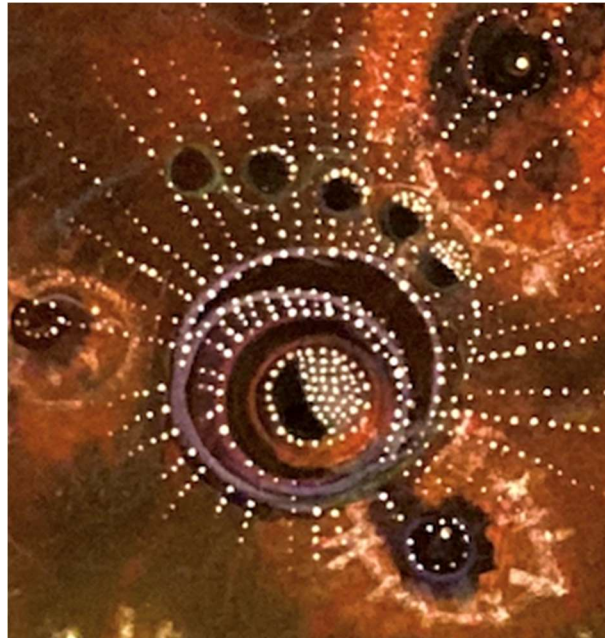


Fig. 13. Close up showing Venus, taken from 'Jupiter and Saturn Dance Together'. Painting by Annette S. Lee, Mixed Media on Paper, 10x 22". Minnesota, US, Dec. 2020.

*"Jupiter and Saturn Dance Together", Annette S. Lee, Mixed Media on Paper, 10 x 22", Dec. 2020*



Fig.14. Production Board - Animated sequence of 'Jupiter and Saturn Dance Together', part of 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight'. Annette S. Lee, Minneapolis, Minnesota, US. Part of the small group exhibit 'Indigenous Survivance'. Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022.  
<https://annettelee.com/index.php/portfolio/indigenous-survivance/>.



Fig. 15. Still Image from Animation ‘Anchored to Earth by Starlight’, overlay of Mini Map and Original Painting, ‘Jupiter and Saturn Dance Together’, part of ‘Anchored to Earth by Starlight’. Annette S. Lee, Minneapolis, Minnesota, US. Part of small group exhibit ‘Indigenous Survivance’. Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022.  
<https://annettelee.com/index.php/portfolio/indigenous-survivance/>.

Feature 3 is two fabric, wall hanging, Indigenous Star Maps. The two tapestries serve as gatekeepers into the space. The layout is all sky and circular. The star maps, Ojibwe Giizhiig Anung Masinaaigan - Ojibwe Star Sky Paper<sup>29,30</sup> and D(L)Akota Makoče Wicāŋhpi Wowapi-Sky Star Map,<sup>31,32</sup> feature Ojibwe and D(L)akota constellations and celestial vocabulary. So called ‘Greek’ constellations are overlaid on the maps in light wash to offer a subtle translation between cultural cosmologies. Feature 4 is a series of Celestial Mini Maps shown animated. Each of the seventeen paintings was painted in relation to a meaningful alignment in the sky based on real-time celestial movements and a place-based relationship to sky. What is happening in the sky, has a direct connection to what is happening on the land. Our human participation in this cosmic

<sup>29</sup> Lee, Wilson, and Gawboy, *Ojibwe Giizhiig Anung Masinaaigan - Ojibwe Star Sky Paper*.

<sup>30</sup> Lee, 'Native Skywatchers Ojibwe Star Map - Building Community Around Native Star Knowledge'.

<sup>31</sup> Annette S. Lee and Jim Rock, *D(L)akota Makoče Wicāŋhpi Wowapi-Sky Star Map*, 2012, Mixed media on paper, 36 x 36", 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Lee and Rock, 'Native Skywatchers and the Makoče Wicāŋhpi Wowapi—D(L)Akota Star Map—Building Community Around Native Star Knowledge'.

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earth-sky mirroring is exactly the Kapemni principle, ‘As it is above; it is below’.<sup>33</sup>



Fig. 16. ‘Pipe Ceremony in the Stars’. Painting by Annette S. Lee, Mixed Media on Paper, 10x 22”, Mar. 2020. Part of ‘Anchored to Earth by Starlight’. Annette S. Lee, Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, part of small group exhibit ‘Indigenous Survivance’. Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022. <https://annettelee.com/index.php/portfolio/indigenous-survivance/>.



Fig. 17. Process shot illustrating watercolor wash, additive and subtractive textures, mark making lights and darks, ‘Pipe Ceremony in the Stars’. Annette S. Lee, Mixed Media on Paper, 10x 22”, Mar. 2020. Part of ‘Anchored to Earth by Starlight’. Annette S. Lee, Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, part of small group exhibit ‘Indigenous Survivance’. Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022. <https://annettelee.com/index.php/portfolio/indigenous-survivance/>.

<sup>33</sup> White Hat Sr., ‘Kapemni-As it is above; it is below’. Annette S. Lee, Jim Rock, and Charlene O’Rourke, *Dakota/Lakota Star Map Constellation Guide: An Introduction to D/Lakota Star Knowledge* (Minnesota: Native Skywatchers Press, 2014).



Fig. 18. Process shot illustrating preliminary watercolor wash, 'Pipe Ceremony in the Stars'. Annette S. Lee, Mixed Media on Paper, 10x 22", Mar. 2020. Part of 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight', Annette S. Lee, Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, part of small group exhibit 'Indigenous Survivance. Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022.  
<https://annettelee.com/index.php/portfolio/indigenous-survivance/>.

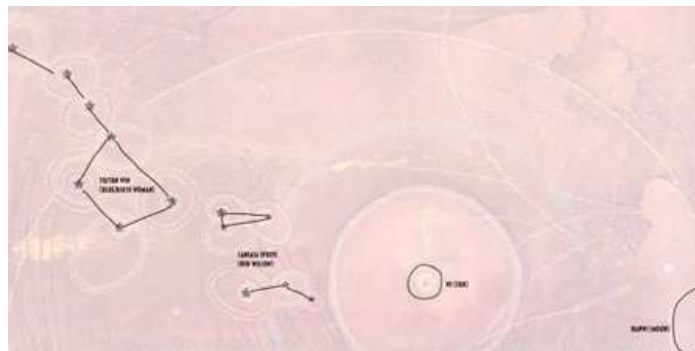


Fig. 19. Still Image from Animation 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight', overlay of Mini Map and Original Painting, 'Pipe Ceremony in the Star'. Annette S. Lee, Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, 2022. Part of 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight', Annette S. Lee, Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, part of small group exhibit 'Indigenous Survivance'., Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022.  
<https://annettelee.com/index.php/portfolio/indigenous-survivance/>.

Feature 5 presents a 'Stillness Bench'. As the projection with audio of soundscape and heartbeat fill the gallery space, the multisensory exhibit is taken in at many levels by the gallery visitor. Experientially this layered motion can be a lot to take in all at once. Much of the intention behind

‘decolonizing relationship to sky’ has much to do with slowing down in a world moving at light speed. The Kapemni pairing of motion is stillness and it is this simple practice that is welcomed here.

#### 4. Conclusion

The exhibit ‘Anchored to Earth by Starlight’ considers maps as more than a utilitarian tool of visual communication or more than artfully done representations of a physical space. Some maps hold deeper messages of discovery, conquering, and charting unknown territories. Maps can be artifacts offering proof of navigation and innovation, in the spirit of human curiosity and exploration, but maps have also historically been used to create boundaries and territories which in turn dictate political and social control. Let’s consider the role of how maps, celestial maps in particular, have been used in colonization. How does this effect our identities both as individuals and as members of the collective human race? This is relevant and even urgent as there is a conscious awareness that dark night skies are going extinct. At the same time, we plow through a sixth mass extinction event caused primarily by human disconnectedness, industrialization, and consumer culture.<sup>34,35</sup> What is lost if we as a species lose our ability to actually be in the presence of a dark night sky canopy? Would we ever gain it back? How are our lives and our identities harmed by this loss?

Secondly, the exponentially growing crisis of colonization and industrialization of our low Earth orbit (LEO) is happening right now. For some this might seem like a privileged abstract, even academic debate, but the reality is that current technology like Starlink is being used (or not) by Ukrainian forces for communication on the front lines and this is an ‘open-

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<sup>34</sup> Gerardo Ceballos, Andres Garcia, and Paul Ehrlich, ‘The Sixth Extinction Crisis’, *J. Cosmol.* 8 (1 January 2010): pp.180–85; Henry M. Paulson Jr, ‘We’re Living Through One of the Most Explosive Extinction Episodes Ever’, *The New York Times*, 30 September 2021, Opinion edition, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/30/opinion/animal-extinction.html>; Martin, ‘UN Report: Nature’s Dangerous Decline ‘Unprecedented’; Species Extinction Rates ‘Accelerating’’, 6 May, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report>; Jeff Tollefson, ‘Humans Are Driving One Million Species to Extinction’, *Nature* 569, no. 7755 (6 May 2019): pp.171–171, <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-01448-4>.

<sup>35</sup> Nathan Rott, ‘The World Lost Two-Thirds Of Its Wildlife In 50 Years. We Are to Blame’, *NPR*, September 10, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/10/911500907/the-world-lost-two-thirds-of-its-wildlife-in-50-years-we-are-to-blame>.



source' war as civilians are participating via their phones, submitting real time information of the enemy's frontlines.<sup>36</sup> The question becomes, who owns the atmosphere of Earth? It seems space is open for business and megaconstellations are currently under way. To what extent can we as human beings learn from the brutal tragedies of colonialization, like boarding schools or the mass graves of native children recently uncovered?<sup>37</sup> What lessons can be learned to inform our choices going forward?

Critically examining celestial star maps from an Indigenous lens brings to light many of these otherwise unconscious biases and allows not just the decolonizing of sky, but a more inclusive, more respectful version of relationship to sky and cosmos to shine forth. As conveyed in the artist statement by A. Lee, 'I am passionate about a multidisciplinary approach to Art as Social Practice. I strive to create transformative experiences responding to and generating paradigmatic shifts at the intersection of art-science-culture'. This exhibit, 'Anchored to Earth by Starlight – Decolonizing Relationship to Sky', featured in the Indigenous Survivance exhibit, is exactly how art as social practice is about wellness, community, and moving forward. The show ends with a call to action, 'What is your relationship to sky? How might it be important? ... The future depends on us. We can do better'.

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<sup>36</sup> Tamir Hayman, 'Open-Source Intelligence and the War in Ukraine', *INSS* (blog), 5 January 2023, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/russia-ukraine-intelligence/>; Gillian Tett, 'Inside Ukraine's Open-Source War', *Financial Times*, 22 July 2022; Chris, 'Ukraine: Open-Source Data Aided Response and Documents Damages and Atrocities', *Esri* (blog), 14 June 2022, <https://www.esri.com/about/newsroom/blog/ukraine-open-source-intelligence/>.

<sup>37</sup> The Associated Press, 'U.S. Report Identifies Burial Sites Linked to Boarding Schools for Native Americans', *NPR*, May 11, 2022, sec. National, <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/11/1098276649/u-s-report-details-burial-sites-linked-to-boarding-schools-for-native-americans>; Ian Austen, 'Horrible History': Mass Grave of Indigenous Children Reported in Canada', *The New York Times*, 28 May 2021, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/28/world/canada/kamloops-mass-grave-residential-schools.html>; Ian Austen, 'How Thousands of Indigenous Children Vanished in Canada', *The New York Times*, June 7, 2021, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/world/canada/mass-graves-residential-schools.html>.

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Fig. 20. Opening reception, Indigenous Survivance-Anchored to Earth by Starlight, Large-scale Projection, 'Moon and Winter Circle - Venus Passes Through Pleiades'(left and center). Photo by A. Lee, Collegeville, Minnesota, US, 2022.