

**Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art**

1286 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6H 1N9 Canada  
T 416.536.1519 | F 416.536.2955 | [www.mercerunion.org](http://www.mercerunion.org)

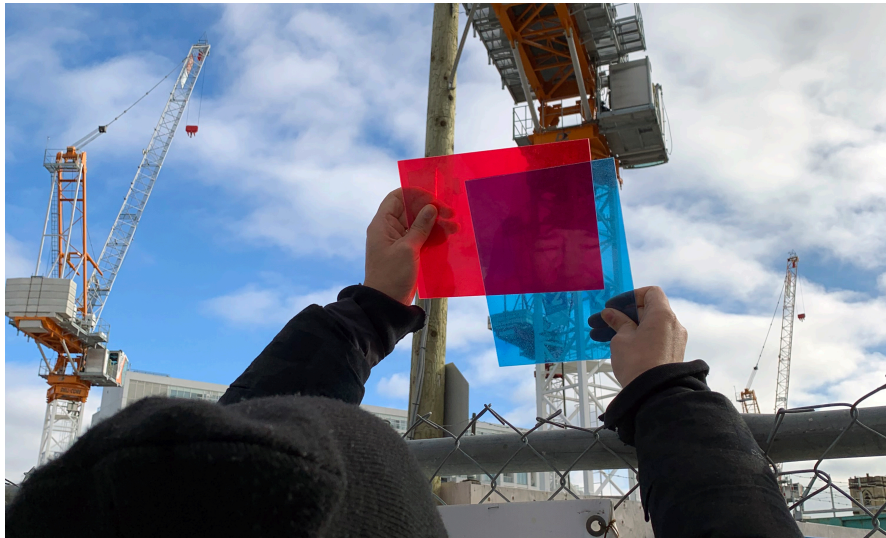
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 22 February 2020

*Bureau of Aesthetics*

Native Art Department International

14 March – 30 May 2020

Opening Reception: 13 March 2020, 7PM

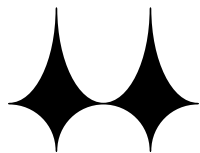


Mercer Union presents the first Canadian exhibition of Native Art Department International (NADI), a long-term collaborative project created and administered by Toronto-based artists Jason Lujan and Maria Hupfield.

While Hupfield and Lujan have respective artistic practices, their work together is authored under the designation of NADI, a collective that produces artworks, exhibitions, events and screenings. Their collaboration employs administrative language in order to frame their area of expertise and responsibility. This strategy provides NADI with greater freedom to frame their work on their own terms. As a result, NADI aims to short-circuit potential expectations and stereotypes built into the name of the collective itself, communicating in terms that are broader than and strengthened by the work of its members and allies.

Working across various platforms, NADI's projects and exhibitions prioritize kinship, relationality and non-competition in order to liberate artists, artworks and aesthetics from classifications ingrained in systems of power and interpretation. Their multi-disciplinary practice—comprising performance, sculpture and video—engages in a collaborative approach to bypass essentialist readings of contemporary artworks and reject reductionist positions projected onto the work of Indigenous cultural producers. *Bureau of Aesthetics* is comprised of a selection of objects that highlight NADI's varying methods.

For instance, NADI has produced neon signs that use electrically transmitted signals and instructions to redirect the viewer's attention. *Untitled (Carl Beam)* was developed after the artists experienced Beam's retrospective at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian in New York City (2011). Hupfield and Lujan took note that the works on view without clear Indigenous references or traditional signifiers were not purchased by major institutions, galleries or private collectors. In their response, NADI overlay a No U-Turn neon sign onto an artist proof of Beam's lithograph entitled *Traffic* from 1997. NADI's intervention recognizes the significance of Beam's work in art history and signals a commitment to continue moving forward and expanding Indigenous discourse, calling for a simultaneous need to reroute value beyond fetishized identity.



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*Maintaining Good Relations* is a lightbox that was installed in the window of Artists Space, New York (2018). When the work was lit, it signalled that the artists' daylong audio broadcast was live and on location. The program had a variety of guests who – like the cast of NADI's public access television styled video series *Everything Sacred is Far Away* (2019) – were drawn from the artists' network of peers. This strategy embodies NADI's desire to build solidarity and pursue progress through collaboration that promotes non-competition. Another important illustration of NADI's ongoing subversion of expectations is their work *There is No Then and Now; Only Is and Is Not* (2018) with Bronx-based artist Dennis Redmoon Darkeem. Their video together features the artist and member of the Yamassee Yat'simioli dancing in an empty theatre, dressed in his Powwow regalia. His dancing is interspersed with text in his own words that describes his experience as an Indigenous man outside of presumed racial and visual codifications.

These objects and more are situated on the walls of a temporary structure at Mercer Union that practically and metaphorically acts as a supporting edifice for the works on display. Here, artworks are pulled away from the confines of the institution and installed on a nomadic structure that fully embodies the ethos and visual language of NADI.

*Bureau of Aesthetics* is NADI's first solo exhibition in Canada and follows the artists' exhibition at KADIST, San Francisco where Mercer Union was the inaugural guest of the Art-Space Residency. Mercer Union conceived of the residency as an incubator to consider approaches of working small-scale, where together with Native Art Department International they took up a series of questions around collaboration and strategies of resistance. Organized by Julia Paoli, Director & Curator and Aamna Muzaffar, TD Assistant Curator

Bureau of Aesthetics is presented in partnership with the Images Festival, 16-22 April 2020 and Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival: 1-31 May 2020. For more information visit [imagesfestival.com](http://imagesfestival.com) and [scotiabankcontactphoto.com](http://scotiabankcontactphoto.com)

**Images**  
FESTIVAL

SCOTIABANK  
**CONTACT**  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
FESTIVAL

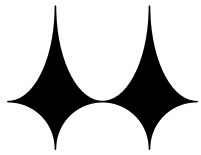
*Bureau of Aesthetics* is made possible with Leading Support from TD Bank Group.



Mercer Union thanks Support Donors Elisa Nuyten & David Dime, and Anonymous.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Native Art Department International** (NADI) is a collaborative long-term project created and administered by Maria Hupfield (Canada) and Jason Lujan (United States). NADI focuses on communications platforms and systems of support in the art world while at the same time functioning as emancipation from essentialism and identity-based artwork. NADI seeks to circumvent easy categorization by comprising a diverse range of activities such as curated exhibitions, video screenings, panel talks, collective art-making and documenting, and an online presence, however all activities contain an undercurrent of positive progress through cooperation and non-competition.



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### **Mercer Union, a centre for contemporary art, Toronto**

Mercer Union is a non-profit, artist-centred space in Toronto. We have a unique track record of presenting innovative exhibitions by diverse Canadian and international artists in formative and established stages of their careers. We are dedicated to supporting the production of new and experimental work, assisting artists in realizing pivotal projects.

Mercer Union has the will and flexibility to take on ambitious projects. We foster an intimate and supportive space for artists to develop and take risks with their work. In turn, their exhibitions play a role in shaping the cultural landscape of Toronto, Canada and beyond.

Mercer Union. Cultivating artists and challenging audiences since 1979.

**Please send all requests for images and interviews to:**

[press@mercunion.org](mailto:press@mercunion.org)

**For more information please visit:**

[mercunion.org](http://mercunion.org)

Mercer Union acknowledges the support of its staff, volunteers and members, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Arts Council and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council.

Admission is free and all are welcome.