

Fireline Kinship

Taylor Baptiste

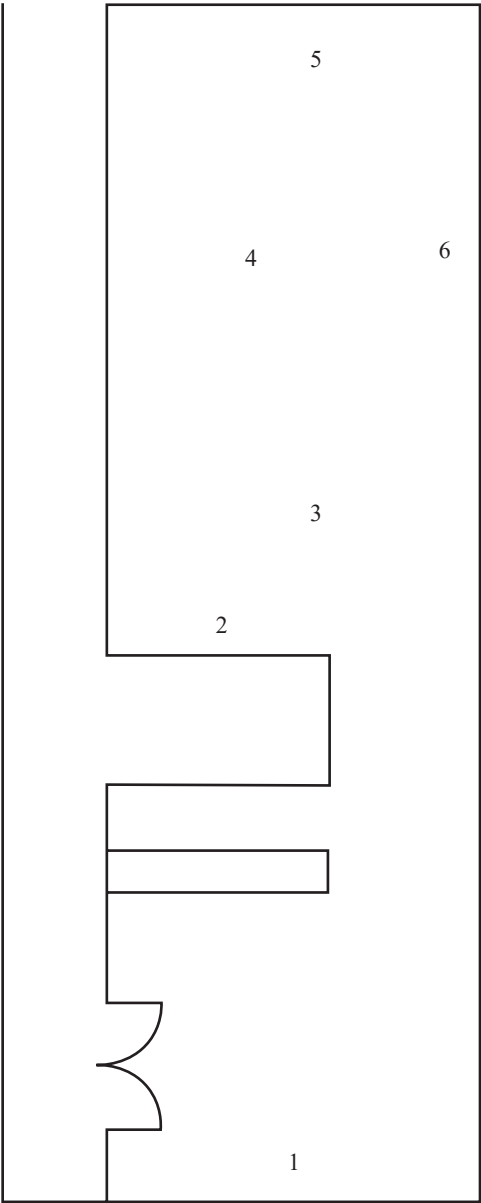
Curated by

Jenn Jackson

**02 October–
13 December 2025**

Or Gallery

Exhibition Map



List of Works

1. **Flicker of Memory**, 2025, ochre pigment pictographs, acrylic paint, plaster, pine needles, 18 x 82cm (right), 28 x 91cm (left). Courtesy of the artist.
2. **Fireline Kinship**, 2025, Nk'Mip, film (duration: 5:18min), Dancers: Jenna Bower and Gage Paul; Candace Gabriel's *Water Song*, Singer: Aimee Baptiste; Firefighter: Wade Baptiste (Oliver Fire Department). Courtesy of the artist.
3. **Wildfire Regalia I**, 2023, used firefighter gear, pine needles, ochre pigment, sinew, 84 x 188cm. Courtesy of the artist.
4. **One Who Puts Out the Light**, 2025, used firefighter gear, eagle feather, abalone shell, sage smudge, kokum scarf, fabric, ribbon, 86 x 97cm. Courtesy of the artist.
5. **Wildfire Regalia II**, 2025, fabric, ribbon, high visibility reflective tape, pine cones, otter fur hair ties, hydrant valve wheels, moccasins, 76 x 165cm. Courtesy of the artist.
6. **Extinguisher**, 2022, pine needles, sinew, 20 x 33cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Fireline Kinship

Vance Wright

On July 19th of 2021, the Nk'Mip Creek Fire first caught light. It was reported to authorities while it covered 700 hectares, but quickly spread over 2,000 hectares. Baptiste first saw a thin pillar of smoke rising from the mountain while at the beach with her family—the beginning of the Nk'Mip Creek Wildfire. Within an hour, they were evacuating her parents to her brother's home 25 km away. Just days later, as the fire spread toward that area, the entire family had to evacuate again. The word "Nk'mip" loosely translates to "bottomland, where the creek meets the lake," referring to a traditional village site at the northeast end of Osoyoos Lake. Today, it is a small but significant part of the Osoyoos Indian Band's territory. The western half of the Osoyoos Indian Band's reserve lies east of the city of Osoyoos and stretches northward, a little east of Oliver, and ends south of Eagle Bluff. It is an unincorporated community located on the east side of the Okanagan River, and is part of the Osoyoos Indian Reserve No. 1. Roughly 200 properties in the Osoyoos Indian Band were put on evacuation notice, including the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre, and a total of 2,500 properties were put on High Alert over 5 jurisdictions. In 2021, the average amount of land burned in forest fires each season was 350,000 hectares. A hectare is 100 meters by 100 meters—an average football field is just over one hectare.

In the Settler-Colonial worldview, Nature and Culture are held firmly separate. When English and French settlers arrived in Turtle Island, writers remarked on how *wild*, and *uncivilized* the land and Indigenous peoples were. The landscape was so terrifying for early Settlers, that the Nation of Canada has its own genre of literary horror—the *Canadian Gothic*, which is defined by the "Garrison

Mentality,” a great fear of a foreboding and hostile environment outside the walls of a fort. This mentality has never really left the Settler Imagination—that the austere wilderness that surrounds Settlers is supernatural, beautiful and treacherous—in need of proper settling. As the project wore on, Settlers’ writing and art began to reflect on *the sublime* in “Canadian” landscapes, making the land look enticing, pristine and untouched to those living back in the Imperial Nation. Around this time, The Crown began carving out Reserve and Crown land, shrinking down Indigenous land to 0.4% in what is now known as “Canada,” and roughly 2.3% in what is known as the “United States of America,” when previously 100% of Turtle Island was stewarded by the Nations living here. Crown land was then divided into land for extraction, and land for recreation and preservation. The Nation of “Canada” both sanctifies and enshrines Nature through the park board, stating that it needs to be preserved, while also engaging in over-extracting resources and mismanagement of the land.

Over 200 years into the Settler-Colonial project, BC Forestry has weakened ecosystems through monoculture, allowing pine beetle populations to explode, eating through whole forests that no longer have the Pine Tree’s partner plants to help fend off this threat. Mining has poisoned water supplies, and decimated entire mountains, and the petroleum industry has spilled countless gallons of unrefined oil through its transport to coastal ports from its rightful resting spot. All this industry is kept out of sight of the everyday citizen, who still thinks of BC’s wildlife as pristine and untouched, kept safe by provincially mandated and protected parks. As so many of us are bought up within this worldview, it appears normal—a fact of life. It is hard to spot how the world is framed for us by the powers that be, but there are moments where the hand holding the frame slips, and rupture follows. The Nk’Mip Creek Fire, among the other 233 fires

that were burning across British Columbia that summer (including the Lytton Fire), was such a moment of slippage.

During my time at Selkirk College, I remember my Geography Professor saying that every 10 square kilometers in British Columbia is ecologically unique from each other, that this “Province” is one of the most biodiverse places on the planet. *The Okanagan* is one of the most unique in terms of climate, flora and fauna. The Syilx territory is much dryer than any of the surrounding territories—it even has a pocket desert that has not seen rain in living memory. The Ponderosa Pine trees here have fire-resistant bark, and deep root systems that make them highly tolerant of drought. This arid region also has its own collection of cactuses and sage. I remember cycling through the Okanagan as a child, and feeling as if I had stepped onto another continent, it was so different from the land I was raised on only a few cities over. And to think an ecosystem that is uniquely equipped to be fire resistant was uncontrollably set ablaze making it clear that the Colonial management of land was not only ill-equipped, but also unable to acknowledge its inadequacy.

I remember hearing from Okanagan Nation members that stewardship of their *tmx^wulax^w* included controlled burnings, as a way to let go what needed to be let go, and allow for new growth to take over. The burns transform detritus into fertile soil, and can awaken seeds. Using protocol and ceremony, the burns help keep diversity high, and therefore the immune system of the land high. Fire is necessary and needed in small amounts. All land within their territory was managed by the Okanagan Nation, regardless of where they had their residences. They have always intimately known what was happening in the Land as they were involved intimately in how the happenings unfolded. This level of intimate involvement with the Land is counter-intuitive to the Settler logic of *Pristine, Untouched*

Wilderness. The Okanagan Nation has stewarded the tnx^wulax^w since time immemorial, and during their stewardship, the land has never known a crisis like the one we face today—and the Colonial Nation state has accomplished this in only a handful of centuries.

Taylor Baptiste's work is firmly rooted in the Nk'Mip Creek Fire. Through textile sculptural works, film and performance, Baptiste looks at this moment of slippage and rupture as a moment in which to celebrate an alternative, one that has been in existence since time immemorial—Okanagan stewardship of the land.

In *Wildfire Regalia I*, the artist reworks secondhand firefighting gear with pine needles, rawhide, sinew, and ochre. At the forehead of the helmet, ochre symbolizes a cultural shield, protecting both body and spirit. Pine needles become ornamentation as fringe along the arms and legs, and a distinguished double-arc over the head resembling a Powwow roach. This action brings to mind Wanda Nanibush's text "Performing Indigenous Sovereignty," when she wrote "it was a secularizing ceremony but also a sacralization of public protest." In turning firefighter gear into regalia, Baptiste simultaneously brings ceremony into the every day, while also elevating blue collar workers and labour to being worthy of ceremony. In *Wildfire Regalia II*, Baptiste styles a new jingle dress with pine cones as the jingles, and high-visibility strips in place of ribbons. In the healing dance of the jingle dress, Baptiste has replaced traditional cones with pine cones. These cones, which open only through fire, highlight the intimate relationship between fire and renewal, a reminder that fire is a crucial part of the land's life cycle. Orange ribbon, hydrant valve wheels, and otter furs top off the dress as hair fasteners, connecting this piece to water, something instrumental for extinguishing fires, and the necessary ingredient for life. *One Who Puts Out the Light* is the last piece in the regalia line, in which a used firefighters jacket

has an abalone shell, an eagle feather and a bundle of sage placed in its breast pocket, further connecting firefighting to ceremony and protocol.

The work *Extinguisher* is a sculptural work of Okanagan pine needle basketry in the form of a fire extinguisher. Baptiste made this work in our graduating year at Emily Carr University of Art + Design, where I witnessed her slowly coil pine needles, round after round, meticulously securing each row in place carefully with sinew. While she assured me she was working extremely fast for basket making, the process was still tedious and arduous. This is a formal and material paradox, as pine needles are high in resin, and so run a risk of a rapid-burning fire if used as fuel. Due to the ubiquity of pine needles in the Okanagan ^{tmx}^{wulax}^w, ritual burnings were decisive, careful and masterful, to prevent a burn that was out of control. This material is woven into the form of a fire extinguisher, something that is highly regulated and commercial, produced quickly and sold quickly, but hopefully rarely used—a last resort. This piece sheds light on the different worldviews of the Syilx Nation and the Colonial Nation, and how each one approaches fire management—one through active and regular prevention, and the other through rushed and frantic reaction.

Next, we have the namesake work, *Fireline Kinship*, in which the regalia and sculptural work are activated through performance and dance to create a short film. Baptiste's family members, Jenna Bower and Gage Paul activate *Wildfire Regalia I & II* through Powwow dance. With this act of showing new regalia, Okanagan sovereignty is performed and enacted, illustrating the deep ties to land that the artists' family has kept through ongoing colonization. Baptiste's brother, Wade, can also be seen wearing *One Who Puts Out the Light*, while showcasing his actual profession and work place. Just as

Powwow dance is a relatively new cultural practice to the Okanagan, firefighting can be seen as Okanagan land stewardship. The film also depicts both the original Nk'Mip Creek Fire, four years after the burning was extinguished with new growth coming in, and the more recent site where Baptiste's parents' house once stood—now also a burnt, marked site of a fire. Through this comparison, we can see the recent burning, and the older site recovering. Just as the fire makes room for new growth in plant kin, it also makes room for cultural reinterpretation and reinvention.

Fireline Kinship is both an exhibition and a vision, a proposed possibility of continuing Okanagan stewardship of the Land, and enacting that connection through ceremony. It is a reflection on how to deal with the loss our Nations suffer in the wake of the Colonial Project, how to heal the wounds we individually and collectively bear, both with our bodies and our Land—together with our family, practicing culture. *Fireline Kinship* also reflects on strategies for preserving culture, and posits that one of the best tactics is to let it transform, and react to the world we live in.

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Fireline Kinship: Stories of Renewal and Resilience in Nk'mip

Taylor Baptiste

Created in response to the 2021 Nk'Mip Wildfire, which swept through Syilx territory and left behind both visible and invisible impacts, this fire moved through the places I call home. It touched the people I love and the land that holds our ancestors, traditional stories, and teachings. This work is about more than what was lost. It's about what continues. And what comes out of it.

It honors the land that was affected, the people who protected it, and the teachings that remain. At its core, *Fireline Kinship* explores fire not only as destruction but as a force of renewal. In Syilx ways of knowing, fire makes space for growth. It clears what has completed its life journey, honoring the natural cycle of renewal and transformation. It reminds us to pay attention, to return to land as relative, and to listen.

The regalia in this body of work are made from worn firefighter gear—materials that once protected people on the front lines, including my older brother Wade, the only member of the Osoyoos Indian Band community currently on the Oliver Fire Department. Reworking this gear into regalia was my way of honoring him and others like him, who carry the responsibility of protecting land, community, and memory, seen and unseen.

Using materials from the land like pine needles, ochre, and pine cones—elements deeply connected to fire, renewal, and protection—I weave together stories of resilience and ceremony. These pieces embody the tension between destruction and healing. They turn heaviness into movement and ceremony, grief into kinship, and fire into a source of life and renewal.

The film *Fireline Kinship* breathes life into these regalia. I am deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to gather some of my family and extended community as vital parts of this work. My dear cousins, the dancers Jenna Bower and Gage Paul, move through the post-fire landscape in regalia, adorned with pine cones and pine needles from Nk'mip. Aimee Baptiste sings Candace Gabriel's *Water Song*, a melody that flows with softness and strength, offering calm and connection. Together, these elements hold breath, memory, and care.

The large diptych sculpture, *Flicker of Memory*, shaped like a tall flame, is painted with acrylic and ochre. Ochre carries both cultural and spiritual significance for Okanagan people. On its surface, I painted pictographs that depict the Nk'Mip fire as it unfolded. These marks act as visual storytelling, recording moments and movements of the fire as it evolved.

The pictographs link the contemporary event of the wildfire to traditional ways of marking time, place, and experience. Through this connection, the sculpture holds the memory of the fire's path, honoring its force while grounding the work in a traditional language that carries our people's stories forward.

For *Extinguisher*, I wove a fire extinguisher using traditional Okanagan pine needle basketry. The piece reflects a contradiction: an object meant to put out fire made from one of the fuels that make our wildfires burn so fiercely. I wove it quickly, echoing the urgency and speed with which fire moves through our territories.

Some Indigenous communities mark the passing of time after a loss with ceremonies—sometimes one year later, sometimes after four. For me, this work is that ceremony, a memorial created four years

after the fire. It has been my way to grieve, to heal, and to keep walking forward. I hope it creates space for others to come together in love, in discussion, or to heal from fires that have affected them as well.

At its core, this project is about land, kinship, and ceremony—the ways we hold space for each other in uncertain times and how we return to the land to find healing. *Fireline Kinship* is a deeply personal love letter to Nk'mip, the land that is woven into my very being, as it heals and regenerates. It is my offering of remembrance, gratitude, and honor for the relationships that endure beyond fire and loss.

At its heart, *Fireline Kinship* holds space for resilience and renewal—reminding us that from loss grows new life, and from grief blooms kinship. This exhibition is my offering: a place to gather, to remember, and to move forward together. Rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, it is a call to walk gently with one another and the land through all seasons of change.

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Taylor Baptiste



Biographies

Taylor Baptiste is an interdisciplinary artist from the Osoyoos Indian Band of the Syilx Okanagan Nation. Her practice is deeply rooted in her upbringing in Nk'Mip—a landscape of sagebrush and wild roses nestled between the mountains and Osoyoos Lake on the Osoyoos Indian Band reservation. Raised by Richard and Colleen Baptiste, her work is shaped by a strong connection to family, community, and ancestral history. Drawing from Syilx storytelling and ways of knowing, Taylor's art reflects an ongoing relationship with the *tmx^wulax^w* (land) and *tmix^w* (all living energies) of the Okanagan. Her practice is guided by a yearning to bridge ancestral knowledge with contemporary forms of expression—working to uphold, reimagine, and carry forward Syilx ways of being in today's shifting world.

Taylor's primary medium is sculpture, through which she blends Okanagan land-based materials and Syilx traditional practices with contemporary forms and approaches. She works with a wide range of materials, including ochre pigment, buckskin, rocks, sinew, beadwork, and found or ready-made objects. Her interdisciplinary practice also extends to digital illustration, painting, photography, film, projection, and most recently, performance. Open to exploring many mediums, Taylor approaches each project with curiosity and a commitment to the stories and places that shape her.

In 2024, Taylor earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Emily Carr University of Art + Design. She has since returned to her home territory, where she lives with her husband and works both as an artist and as the Cultural Coordinator at the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre. These dual roles are deeply interconnected; her work at the Centre supports and extends her artistic practice through community-based research and archiving, the repatriation of cultural and ancestral belongings, and the facilitation of workshops that center Syilx knowledge, land-based teachings, and cultural continuity. This

reciprocal relationship between her art and community work allows her to uphold and contribute to the living cultural knowledge while continuing to evolve as a contemporary Syilx artist.

Vance Wright (they/them) is a reconnecting two-spirit member of the Tl'azt'en Nation, and was raised on the unceded territories of the Sinixt Nation in what is colonially known as Nelson BC. Currently residing in the occupied and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations in Vancouver, they are an emerging artist, curator and writer. They hold a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Emily Carr University, with a major in Critical and Cultural Practices and a minor in Curatorial Studies. Their art work has been exhibited in the Contemporary Native Art Biennial (BACA), as well as Artist Run Centres such as Massy Arts Society or Oxygen Art Center.

Public Programs

Opening Celebration

Thursday, October 2, 2025, 5:00-8:00pm

Or Gallery

Artist Talk with Taylor Baptiste

Saturday, November 22, 2025, 2:00pm

Or Gallery

Artist Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliłwətał Nations for graciously hosting my first solo exhibition outside of my home territory of the Okanagan. The xʷməθkʷəy̓əm territory is like a second home to me, as my husband is from there, making this exhibition especially meaningful. Your support and welcome mean so much, and I am honored to share this work on your lands.

A special thank you to Jenn Jackson, whose unwavering belief and support have been foundational from the first sculpture to the development of the full body of work. Jenn has been a constant source of encouragement, insight, and mentorship. I am deeply grateful for her vision as a curator and her dedication in helping bring this exhibition to life at Or Gallery. This journey has been filled with many meaningful firsts for both of us, and I cherish experiencing them together. Jenn's faith in this work and in me has made all the difference early in my career, and I look forward to continuing to grow alongside her.

To the rest of the Or team, Autumn Coppaway and Queena Cheung, thank you for your patience, kindness, and care throughout this process. The months leading up to the opening were personally challenging, and your support helped me navigate that turbulence. Your dedication to this exhibition and to my well-being has not gone unnoticed, and I am deeply grateful.

To my cousins, Jenna Bower and Gage Paul, thank you for breathing life and spirit into these regalia through your movement. Your presence and energy transformed the pieces beyond what I imagined. Watching your dancing reminded me of the deep connections between our culture, our bodies, the tmixʷ, and the stories we carry forward.

To my relatives Aimee Baptiste and Candace Gabriel, kn k^wukscutx. Aimee, your beautiful voice carried calming and healing energy into the film. Candace, your generous permission to use the *Water Song* suffused the calming, restorative power of siwłk^w (water) into the work, a source of healing especially necessary after fire. Together, your contributions brought a profound sense of peace and renewal that resonates throughout.

To my dear friend Vance Wright—limləmt for writing the essay accompanying this body of work; your gifted voice, insight, and deep understanding of my practice make your words all the more meaningful for me.

Lionel Trudel, your incredible skill in photography and videography has transformed this work, bringing it into new forms that elevate it to another level. Thank you for your enthusiasm and for beautifully weaving my vision into the final form.

I also want to acknowledge and honor everyone who worked tirelessly during the Nk'Mip Wildfire of 2021. To the Oliver Fire Department, Osoyoos Fire Department, BC Wildfire Service, Anarchist Mountain Fire Department, Osoyoos Indian Band Emergency Response Team, Canadian Armed Forces, Structure Protection Teams, Incident Management Teams, and all other unnamed support personnel, your bravery and dedication saved lives and land. Your efforts are deeply appreciated and form an integral part of the story behind this work.

Finally, this exhibition would not have been possible without the generous support of the Audain Foundation, Canada Council for the Arts, British Columbia Arts Council, and the City of Vancouver. Thank you for believing in this project and helping bring it to the public.

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Or Gallery acknowledges its presence on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwx̣wú7mesh, and səliwətəl First Nations, who have stewarded this land since time immemorial.

Or Gallery is generously supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, the British Columbia Arts Council, and the City of Vancouver along with numerous community partners, donors, and volunteers. We are especially grateful for the visionary support of the Audain Foundation.

All illustrations courtesy of Taylor Baptiste.

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