

## THE TWO-SPIRITS OF THE FIRST NATIONS

### Adrian Stimson: Naked Napi and Other Stories

Adrian Stimson's *Naked Napi Big Smoke* exhibition was first shown at the SUM Gallery, Vancouver, in 2018, then at the Edmonton Art Gallery in 2019 and at the Paul Petro Contemporary Art in Toronto around June-July this year.

#### NAPI

*"Historically, indigenous peoples were sexual and were not ashamed of sex or their bodies. Nudity was normal, the human body was a part of nature and in observing nature, sexuality was diverse and to be celebrated. For the Blackfoot, a lot of our stories have sexual content, sex and sexuality was often interwoven within the language" –*  
Adrian Stimson



Adrian Stimson  
*Naked Napi Big Smoke #6, 2019*  
Oil, acrylic and 24 karat gold leaf



Adrian Stimson  
*Buffalo Boy's Born Again, 2012*  
Performance

ADRIAN STIMSON

*During my MFA at the University of Saskatchewan, I wrote a paper called “Too Two Spirited for you; the absence and presence of Two Spirited people in Western Culture and Media”. Part of the research was going back in history to the earliest meetings between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples to see if there were any depictions of Two Spirited people.*

*Of many artists Theodore De Bry stands out. De Bry who never visited the Americas, created a number of etchings for books, illustrating various meetings between conquistadors and indigenous populations as well as depictions of indigenous life. These depictions were based on firsthand accounts, highly stylized and detailed and often-portrayed violent acts toward the indigenous population reinforcing the colonial conquest narrative.*

*De Bry’s images are evidence of the diversity of sexuality in the America’s pre-contact; they prove that for the colonizers, indigenous sexuality was to be feared, conquered or destroyed. Sadly as De Bry’s etchings prove many “sodomites” were put to their death, thus pushing underground or eradicating Two Spirited being, sexuality and ceremony. Western Christian morality was not compatible with many of America’s indigenous populations, a systemic process of eradicating indigenous ways of being was put into place; Indian Wars, starvation, diseased blankets, aggressive assimilation, residential schools were some of the many racist policies implemented and continue in our times.*

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*For the Blackfoot, a lot of our stories have sexual content, sex and sexuality was often interwoven within the language. A cultural worker friend of mine who was in charge of recording elders many years ago, told me how funny it was to translate the recordings of the elder women, she said, "it was like being in a men's locker room", the descriptive, unapologetic and funny use of sexuality within the language demonstrates that we were not afraid of our sexuality nor western morally, we are not bound to western ideas of piety, shame and fear of sex and sexual diversity. Yet the damage has been done and now, it is our right and duty to reclaim our sexual histories, I first presented Naked Napi at the SUM gallery in Vancouver, I now present Naked Napi Big Smoke in Toronto. I hope through this series of paintings to trigger people, to help them understand and accept our ways of life. To be Napi and create stories for our time and Two-Spirited being.*

*Napi is a Blackfoot character that is central to our stories; he is often referred to as the "Old Man". Napi comes from the sun, he is our quasi-Creator, he is crazy, funny, and is sometimes a fool. He also can be brutal and very mean. In many of our stories, Napi is the creator – along with "Old Woman"– of many of our objects and creatures. Napi is not our god, yet like many divine entities he is credited with the creation of the world and everything in it. But Napi also gets into a lot of trouble when he starts messing with his own creation; this is why we also refer to Napi as a trickster, a contrary. Napi stories are very familiar in Blackfoot country, often told by elders who have a history of storytelling and the rights to tell these stories. Napi and his many stories are our guide to life, he teaches us lessons on how to live and not to live, in a way he is our moral guide, giving us insight into our human condition.*

*My intent by creating the series of paintings called Naked Napi and Naked Napi Big Smoke is to talk back to and appropriate De Bry's depictions, especially the*

*emasculaton, degradation and slaughtering of the Two-Spirited, to bring them into the present, exorcise the horrors that these Two-Spirited people faced, to reclaim our power, bodies and sexuality.*



**Adrian Stimson**  
*Naked Napi Big Smoke*, 2019  
Oil, acrylic and 24 karat gold leaf

*While Napi Stories are often told by elders who have been the recipients of these stories from time immemorial, a new generation of Blackfoot artists, actors and story tellers have started to create new Napi stories, Napi is not static, he is dynamic. By creating these stories, I hope to reimagine Napi in the present, to Queer him, to create new stories and ideas based on our past yet reflect our present and future. As a part of creating these paintings, each painting will come with a story, a story in English, to be translated into Blackfoot. Stories that share moments in our time, our struggles, our hopes, both funny and tragic. Hopefully, this creates a space where we can imagine a future where Napi still gives us insight into our human condition and be a continuum of Indigenous/Blackfoot knowledge.*

Source: <http://www.paulpetro.com/exhibitions/536-Naked-Napi>

Théodore de Bry : " *Born in Liège in 1528, Théodore de Bry learned the art of engraving from Albert Dürer. Protestant, he left his hometown for Strasbourg to escape the seizure of his property and persecution. In 1587, he moved to London with his family for some time before settling permanently in Frankfurt. He made himself known by the publication of engravings that illustrated the great events of the first Spanish and Portuguese expeditions in the New World. Having never visited the Americas, he made his engravings according to the explorers' observations and tends to denounce the violence perpetrated by the settlers against the Indians. A recognized engraver, he died in Frankfurt in 1598.* " – Chandeigne, " Théodore de Bry ",

<https://editionschandeigne.fr/collaborateur/theodore-de-bry/>

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