iNdigital Landscapes
Final Report

Prepared for

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Archer is a performance artist, new media artist, filmmaker, writer, curator, and educator. Born in Alert Bay, British Columbia, in 1963, he has been a practicing artist since 1984 with a particular interest in the intersection of Plains Cree culture and digital technology, often merging "traditional" objects such as hand drums with ìforward engineeredî devices such as Mac PowerBooks. His work has been exhibited across Canada and in Paris, France, and featured in publications such as *Fuse Magazine* and *Canadian Theatre Review*.

Elizabeth LaPensée
Elizabeth LaPensée, Ph.D., is an award-winning designer, writer, artist, and researcher who creates and studies Indigenous-led media such as games and comics. She is Anishinaabe from Baawaating with relations at Bay Mills Indian Community, Métis named for Elizabeth Morris, and settler-Irish. She is an Assistant Professor of Media & Information and Writing, Rhetoric & American Cultures at Michigan State University. She is a 2018 Guggenheim Fellow.

Jackson 2bears
Jackson 2bears is a Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) multimedia installation/performance artist and cultural theorist from Six Nations currently based in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. Since 1999, 2bears has exhibited his work extensively across Canada in public galleries, museums, and artist-run centres, as well as internationally in festivals and group exhibitions.

Jason Lewis
Jason Edward Lewis is a Full Professor of Design and Computation Arts. He is a digital media artist, poet, and software designer. He founded Obx Laboratory, directing research on the use of virtual environments to help Aboriginal communities preserve, interpret, and communicate cultural histories, devise new means of creating/reading digital texts, and develop systems for the creative use of mobile technology.

Loretta Todd
Loretta Todd is a Métis Cree Canadian film director, producer, activist, storyteller, and writer. She belongs to what has been classified as the second wave of Aboriginal Canadian film directors and has been internationally recognized for her non-fiction work, which strives to express the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples and communities through their own voices.

Lisa Jackson
With a background in documentary, including acclaimed short *SUCKERFISH* and *RESERVATION SOLDIERS* for CTV, Lisa Jackson expanded into fiction with *SAVAGE*, which won a 2010 Genie award for Best Short Film. She is known for her cross-genre projects, including VR, animation, performance art films, and a musical. *Playback* magazine named her one of 10 to Watch in 2012. Her work has played at festivals internationally, including Berlinale, Hot Docs, SXSW, Tribeca, and London BFI, as well as airing on many networks in Canada.

INTRODUCTION

As Indigenous people, we occupy and embody layered landscapes. Beyond the social, cultural, ecological, and artistic milieu we navigate on a daily basis, digital paradigms have emerged in contemporaneity as additional and intersecting layers. "Digital" simultaneously represents place, tool, vehicle, history, and potential: an arena conceptualized initially as a "free and open space, much like the New World was imagined by the Europeans."[1] Though colonizing terms like "frontier" and "wild west" emerged in kind, access to and use of these realms were not limited to the settler imagination.

Today, "digital" is not limited to cyberspace. Instead, it represents unique spaces populated by diverse forms of media: virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), mixed reality (XR), 360 videos, video games, interactive fiction and the web, to name a few. Digital media is marked by a fluidity in its expression–creatives may work within mixed frameworks of a variety of disciplines and skillsets, and there are no strict standardizations to form or content. Where there are many born-digital works, digital media is not necessarily limited to creations on screens. A painting is easy to classify and categorize. What happens when the work is hybridized? If a painting is scanned, digitally modified, animated, and projected? Beyond its status as a distinct discipline, new media sees regular use in cross-disciplinary activation: compositing and special effects in film, AR filters applied to kinetic performance, and electronic and glitch-based remixing.

As an Indigenous organization, imagineNATIVE has played a crucial role in Indigenous-made media, developing platforms for artists to assert their voices, express their perspectives, and share their cultures. Since 2018, the organization has presented new media works through Digital + Interactive, leveraging its successes for film to develop an ecosystem specifically for new media practitioners. Dedicated programming has been designed to celebrate and elevate media art that pushes boundaries and represents further explorations into storytelling using emergent technologies:

"We don't know what we're going to be presenting in the future, because we don't know what technologies we'll have, but we want to be ready for them. We want to put those tools in the hands of Indigenous creatives, and to be the first to show cool new works with Indigenous themes in those media."[2]

As part of this commitment to building Indigenous capacity and community, iNdigital Landscapes is an initiative proposing to enact organizational change in the digital media sector. In a rapidly growing digital landscape, Indigenous perspectives and processes must be fostered to ensure a diverse and robust sector. In addition to creating the foundation for Digital + Interactive within imagineNATIVE, this project established the Listening Tours, a consultation process exploring issues and opportunities related to the advancement of the Indigenous digital arts. Culminating in a two-day national Digital Symposium and subsequent public report, this work aims to illuminate new paths for better supporting the development and presentation of Indigenous digital media.

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[1] Lewis, J., and Fragnito, S. (2005). Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (p. 29).

[2] Johns, M. (2022, April 29). Listening Tours Symposium. imagineNATIVE.

Based on the research conducted over this period, several key issues were raised through consultation with Indigenous digital artists. Many commented on the digital gap and the inability to connect due to a lack of internet access. Other issues included a lack of control over their work once uploaded online. Concerns around intellectual property and cultural appropriation were also key. Access to training and education were also significant factors in the ability to participate in the digital media industry. Access to funding and the ability to network in a manner that allows for capacity building were also cited as barriers to the growth of the Indigenous digital media industry.

One of the biggest hurdles facing the development of Indigenous-driven digital projects is the inability for Indigenous artists and Indigenous digital developers to connect their skills. At present, there are no widely accessible means of matching Indigenous technologists and artists with complementary skill sets. This disparity in skill matching affects more than just the Indigenous arts community but also the arts community globally. Even with global access to communication and resources, there remains a struggle to connect Indigenous practitioners in meaningful ways which are reflective of their artistic practice and cultural priorities.

Issues affecting Indigenous communities also contribute to the capacity of Indigenous artists to create work, disseminate work and connect to other artists. These issues include identity, responsibility to community, education/training, funding, and distribution sources. Many of the artists who participated in this report spoke of the need to connect to other artists in their own community, both regionally and across Canada. Many expressed connectivity as an early career need: networking through events, festivals, and gatherings, as well as driving specific Indigenous digital training and education. Other issues affecting Indigenous artists included those resulting from the oppression, colonization, and legacies of residential schools.
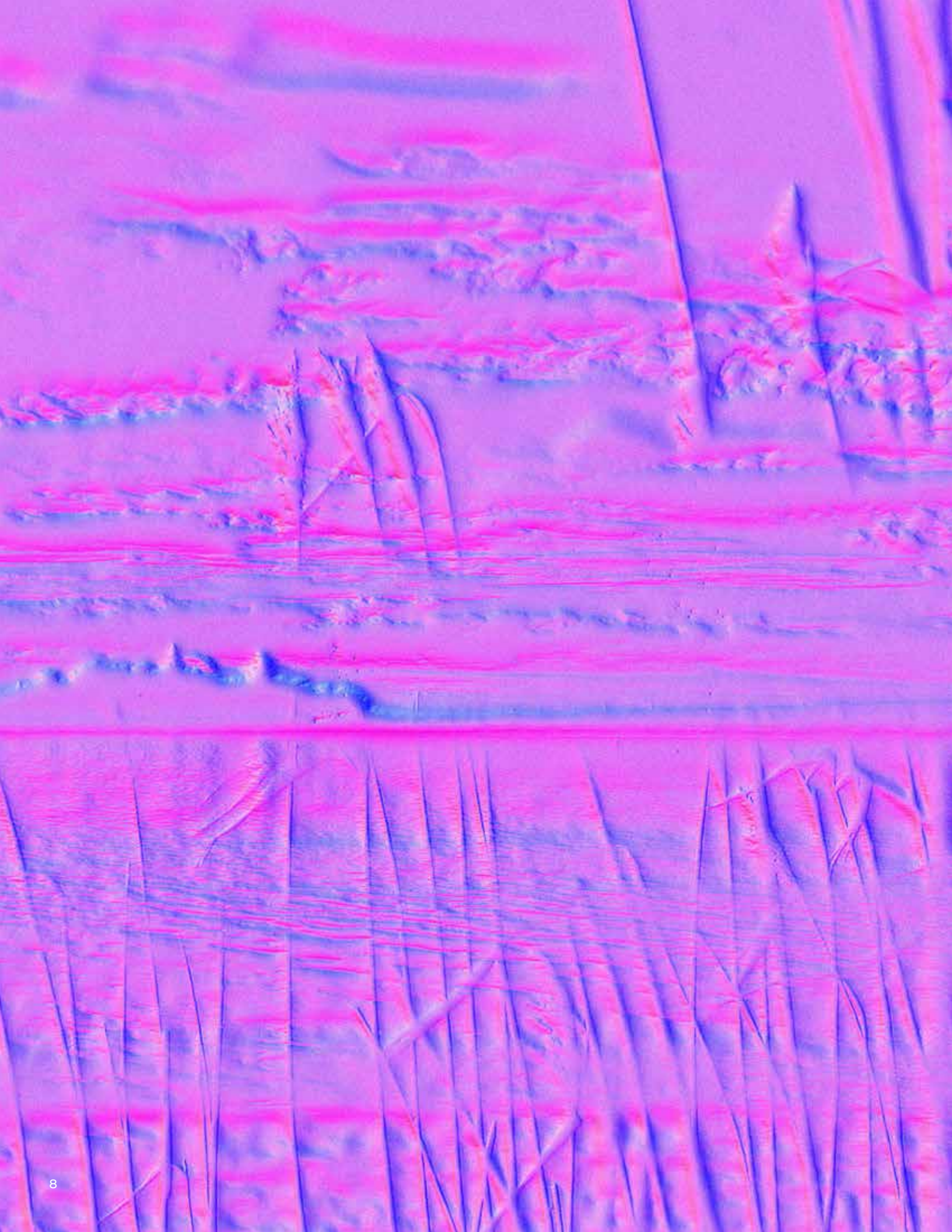
METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in the iNdigital Landscapes project was based on Indigenous research methods and utilized qualitative research using conversational interviews and focus groups. A literature review was undertaken to explore theoretical and academic approaches to the Indigenous use of digital technology and the interactions between the digital and Indigenous culture; a bibliography is appended.

The qualitative methodology focused on anecdotal and narrative approaches. The research was undertaken with the same respect and reciprocity as stated by Wilson, "An Indigenous methodology must be a process that adheres to relational accountability. Respect, reciprocity, and responsibility are key features of any healthy relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology."[3] Alanis Obomsawin shared how she builds relationships with the community:

"When I am first doing a project, I spend a lot of time in a community and develop relationships with different people, especially old people. I just love hearing old people. I'm a listener and I wanted to hear the children. It took a long time, but I got there and they were so normal and they told me all kinds of stories. It was just because I was there and I was one of them...we played together. We did all kinds of things together, and I told them lots of stories. They felt normal. We were talking with so much enthusiasm. They wanted to tell it like it felt."[4]

For this process, interview questions were developed as guiding inquiry. Conversations were based on a reciprocal and relational methodology that progressed organically, allowing artists to freely speak about their specific experiences and interactions with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. These discussions were highly informative and allowed for in-depth engagement with individual digital artists, organizations, and groups.

The primary purpose was to talk to people who populate this digital landscape, holding conversations and building relationships. These conversations differ from traditional qualitative focus groups in that they weren't structured and governed by a formalized set of questions. There was no framework around who could speak and when, nor were conversations strictly held to numbered queries.

[3] Wilson, S. (2008). The Elements of an Indigenous Research Paradigm. In *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (p. 77). Essay, Fernwood Pub.
[4] Obomsawin, A. Keynote Interview, April 27, 2022.

It is important to note that with every interview and gathering, whether online or in person, we began by creating a relaxed environment for conversation, which encouraged the artists to join in. Due to shifting Covid restrictions throughout the process, only three focus groups were held in person: organizations and artists meeting at the Banff Centre in Alberta, the Bosa Institute at Capilano University in Vancouver, and First Light Friendship Centre in Newfoundland. The rest were held virtually. The digital nature of the gatherings made it all the more important to create a cozy and intimate environment where each artist felt comfortable sharing.

The project focused on reaching out to artists and organizations across Canada to solidify our understanding of contemporary Indigenous digital landscapes. Outreach included reaching specific senior artists for keynote interviews, media labs located in several universities, artists from across the country, Indigenous art organizations, and some funders. A total of seven (7) keynote interviews were conducted alongside focus groups with twenty-four (24) artists and seventeen (17) Indigenous organizations who support digital media artists.

These artists represent a number of nations, geographies, and artistic disciplines within digital media. Interviews were conducted with members from various First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, including those from the West Coast, Plains, Ontario, Québec, and the East Coast. We were able to speak to Haida, Blackfoot, Anishinaabe, Métis, Mohawk, Cree, Ojibwe, Algonquin, Mi'kmaq, Métis, and Inuit practitioners. The media labs we spoke to were from the University of Waterloo, Banff Centre, Concordia, and the University of Winnipeg; funders included the Indigenous Screen Office, The National Film Board, ArtsNfld, and ArtsNS. Speaking to a cross-section of artists, arts organizations, and other organizations who serve the Indigenous digital sector was essential to determining a full spectrum of the landscape, including specific gaps and potential opportunities for collective capacity building.

The following sections represent key issues identified throughout the Listening Tours process, followed by reflections and recommendations.
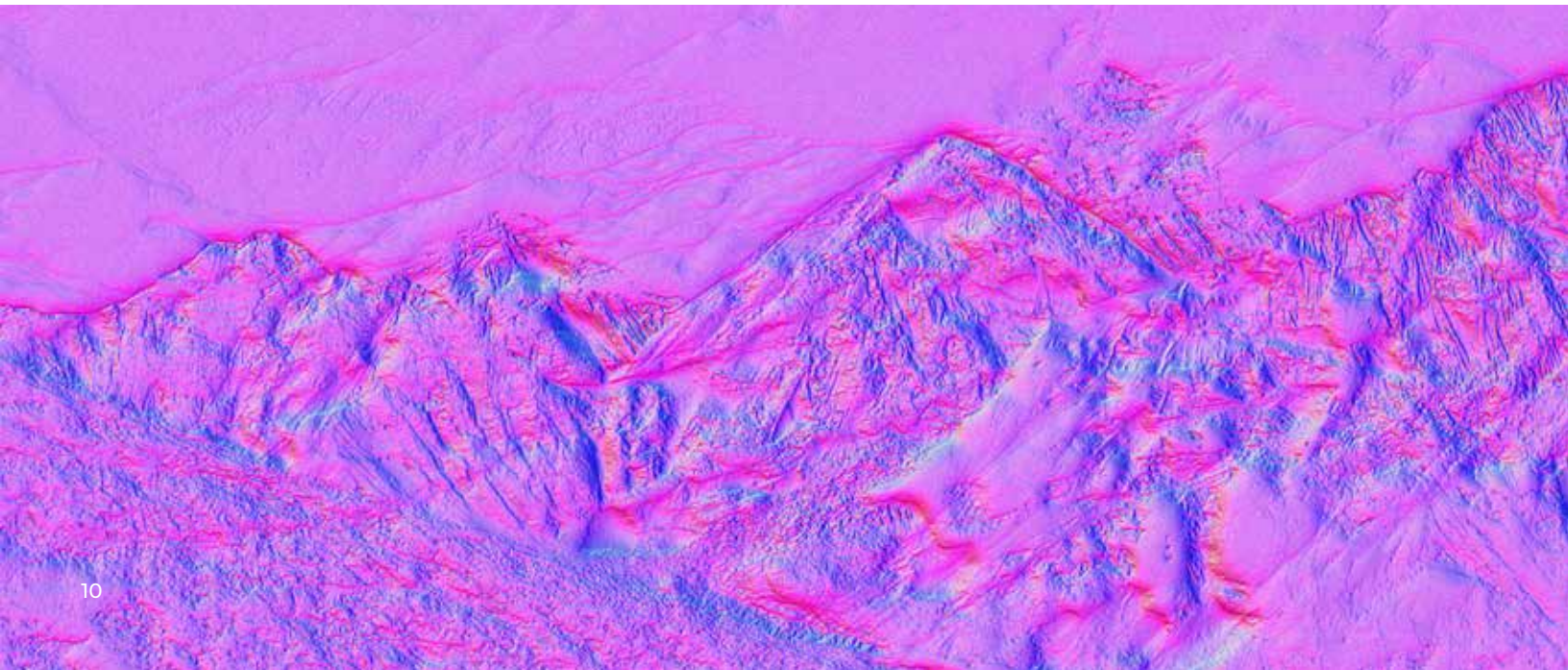
DIGITAL GAP

Responsible development of the Indigenous digital industry is a monumental task facing many challenges. Meeting and connecting skills, matching Indigenous technicians with Indigenous artists, and creating Indigenous digital spaces are the initial hurdles confronting Indigenous communities and, specifically, Indigenous artists. The path for anyone who wishes to work with an Indigenous person skilled in digital technology is riddled with twists and turns and can often end in disappointment. The enormous digital divide in Indigenous communities is one such barrier.

There are many national and international movements to increase the availability of digital networks in Indigenous communities, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the United Nations, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). However, without the political will of the Canadian Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments to work with Indigenous communities, the TRC Calls to Action and the UNDRIP Articles remain unachieved.

In Canada, there have been some grassroots communities who have attempted to create their own internet. K-net is one ICT Service provider based out of Sioux Lookout in Ontario, which offers a range of services, including cellular, broadband connectivity, and online applications. Other communities, including Six Nations and Moose Cree First Nation, provide cable networks which include the internet. Overall, these providers are rare, hard to fund, and often don't survive. Obtaining governmental licenses to run these networks is difficult and costly, and the areas they can cover are incredibly limited: K-net covers a small range in Northern Ontario, Six Nations Internet covers the Six Nations of the Grand River, and Moose Factory Cable covers the island of Moose Factory, an area of just over 5 square kilometres.
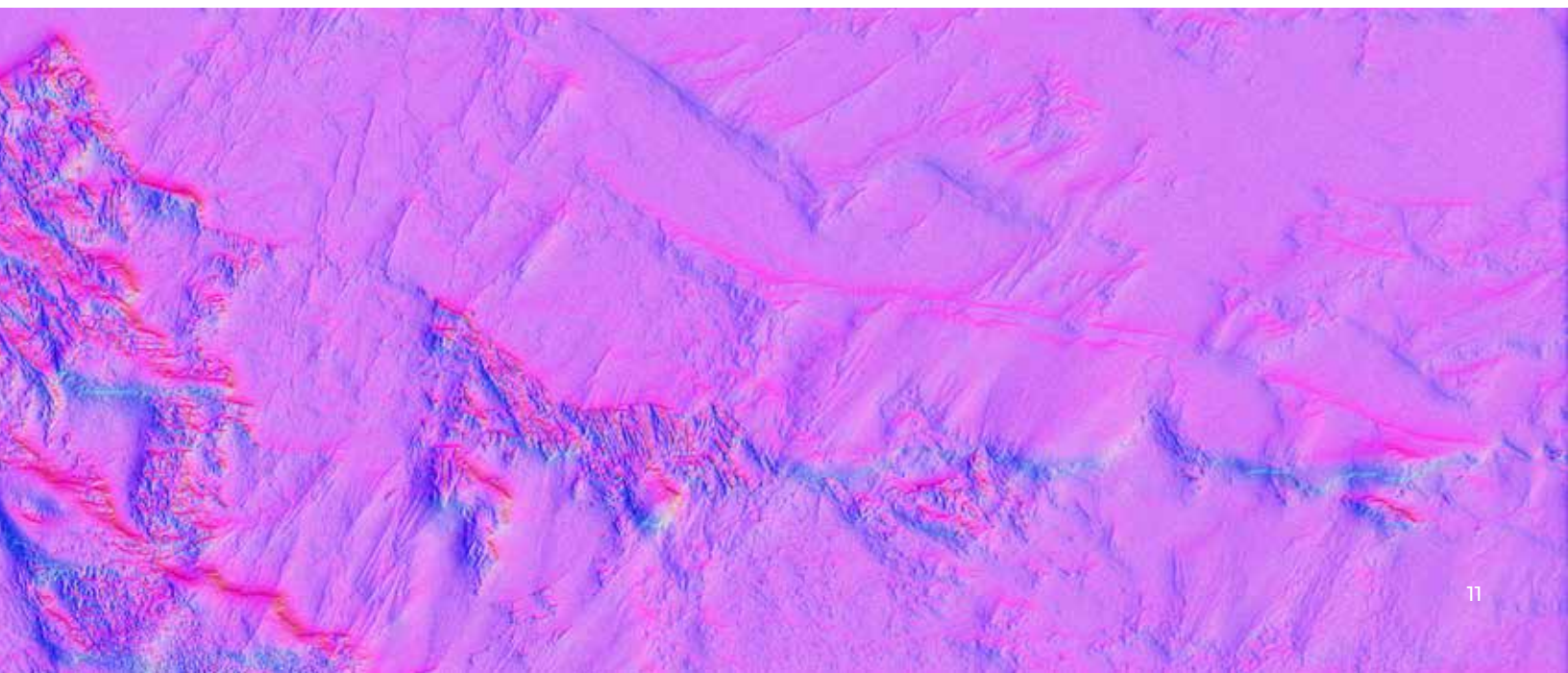
ACCESS TO CONNECTIVITY

The lack of connectivity within the Indigenous community on reserve, in rural settings, and in urban centres is far below the norm for mainstream Canadian society. There is an acute effect on Indigenous communities' lack of connectivity, especially during the Covid pandemic.

The reality is, high-speed internet still hasn't come to large parts of rural and northern Canada, limiting online activity for many Indigenous Peoples. In 2017, the CRTC found that about 24% of households in First Nations communities had high-speed internet, compared with 97% of urban and 37% of rural households. Among Indigenous Peoples 15 years old and up, 76.4% use the internet daily; among all Canadians, daily usage is 91%.[5]

On the international front, the UN General Assembly declared "internet access a human right" in 2016.[6] They passed a non-binding resolution that brought attention to the need for internet connectivity but did nothing to address the responsibilities of governments to provide it; very few countries have taken action in this direction. In 2010 Finland had already declared broadband access a legal right, and in 2013 Mexico made a constitutional amendment that declared internet access a human right.[7]

Canada, however, has not taken any steps to increase internet access, especially for Indigenous communities. The capacity of Indigenous communities to maintain essential services in education as well as physical and mental health is severely limited; how can there be economic development, job opportunities, or remote employment when 76% of the community has no access to the internet? How can they reclamation sovereignty and address self-determination without access to the rest of the globe?

The City of Ottawa defined the digital divide as being "at the intersection of other divides including sex, race, age, language, ability, education, income, and location."[8] Due to the economic realities of Indigenous people living in urban centres, access to high-speed internet is below the national average. The result is a continuation of our people left behind in all aspects of society and an ever-widening digital divide.

Indigenous digital sovereignty and community-based digital solutions have been made more than challenging by government processes. In order to create digital services, a company or community must have obtained a spectrum license. These licenses are usually held by large telecommunications companies who are notoriously slow to provide services to geographic areas where Indigenous communities are located. According to the Council of Canadian Academics, the Government of Canada "has not set aside spectrum for Indigenous Nations, as have governments in Mexico, New Zealand, and the United States."[9] First Nations are not even able to develop internet solutions in communities because the government has not set aside licenses.

The process to obtain these licenses is immensely complicated, requiring such expensive consultation and expertise that the act of applying is beyond the ability of most Indigenous communities. As of 2019, "65% of households on First Nations reserves did not have access to 50/10 unlimited, compared to 54% of households in rural communities. While connectivity data related to Inuit communities are not available, as of 2019 no households in Nunavut had access to download speeds of 25 Mbps or greater (half of the federal government's target of 50 Mbps download speed)."[10]

Access to high-quality broadband connectivity is a fundamental component of the Government of Canada's role in reconciliation: "The failure to deliver high-quality broadband services to Indigenous communities has

[5] Leadership, R. B. C.- T. (n.d.). Building Bandwidth: Preparing Indigenous youth for a digital future - PDF. Royal Bank - Thought Leadership. Retrieved February 6, 2022, from https://royal-bank-of-canada-2124.docs.contently.com/v/building-bandwidth-preparing-indigenous-youth-for-a-digital-future-pdf.

[6] Berry, J. (2020, May 26). Covid-19 exposes why access to the internet is a human right. OpenGlobalRights. Retrieved April 26, 2022, from https://www.openglobalrights.org/covid-19-exposes-why-access-to-internet-is-human-right/.

[7] Ibid.

[8] City of Ottawa Social Planning Council. (n.d.). Tackling the digital divide with a collaborative ... - ncf.ca. Retrieved February 6, 2022, from https://www.ncf.ca/en/documents/75/Digital_Equity_Part_1_Increasing_Digital_Equity_in_Ottawa_Final_2021.pdf.

[9] Council of Canadian Academies (2021). Waiting to Connect, Ottawa (ON). The Expert Panel on High-Throughput Networks for Rural and Remote Communities in Canada, Council of Canadian Academies.

[10] Ibid.

exacerbated inequities between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people in Canada." [11]

Isuma TV was created in part to address the digital divide. Located 200 miles above the Arctic Circle–where the only internet service available is through satellite–they use innovation and technology to make their work available to communities in their region. "We started to do that, doing our own little community TV and also trying to expand to other communities. We're using technology, but we're in the digital divide. So the digital speed is really slow up here. Sometimes it can't even carry out video for a long period of time." [12]

By downloading their videos onto hard drives in Montreal, Isuma is able to plug into a cable service called Headline and bring content to community. Isuma is unique in having the capacity to reach into the future to maintain access for communities. Zacharias Kunuk elaborated, "Nowadays everything is in cyberspace. We're one of the first two channels in Shaw, just two companies that are working in cyberspace...I was trying to learn the future: new cameras, what they can do. Right now we have a channel. All you have to do is do a playlist and everything is in cyberspace. You just program your channel. There it is." [13]

Not every community has the capacity or access to innovate in the same way as Isuma. Many artists are working alone on reserves without the internet. One artist described their experience, "I'm trying to also see what workflows exist for people who are like me on the rez with poor internet and not great access to resources. So whenever I'm trying to work in these fields, I'm keeping in the back of my mind, would this be feasible to do on a reserve for, say, a kid who just has a crappy laptop?" [14]

Scholars and artists Jason Lewis and Skawenatti have blazed a trail through cyberspace, shaping it into a world readily recognized by Indigenous communities. However, they caution on how the development of the online world can be built:

"Its foundations were designed with a specific logic, built on a specific form of technology, and first used for specific purposes (allowing military units to remain in contact after a nuclear attack). The ghosts of these designers, builders, and prime users continue to haunt the blank spaces." [15]

Their successes in *CyberPowWow, Skins, and Within Reservations* demonstrate spaces envisioned and created by Indigenous people using Indigenous knowledge and paradigm. Through this success, they urge other Indigenous people to continue to build new online territories where we can tell our stories.

Despite connectivity issues, the digital divide, access, and education, there is still a strong Indigenous online community who have worked to develop digital skills. Beyond software skills, these practitioners have grown outreach skills, distribution skills, and engagement in leading-edge formats like virtual reality, augmented reality, extended reality, and artificial intelligence. These artists are striving to find and create opportunities for themselves as well as for others. In connecting these artists within and without, what steps need to be taken to ethically expand these communities?

"I was grabbing stuff from the internet because I didn't have access to Elders. I didn't have access to my community. Now I do." [16]

Social media is one avenue that many artists use to find each other, especially when seeking collaborators for projects: many spoke about posting on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Another method of community building can be found in the free app Discord: servers like the Indigenous Game Devs allow digital artists to find each other and virtually share ideas. Another existing means of networking is through Indigenous-specific training and post-secondary education. While it is often necessary for artists to move to urban centres to obtain this type of training and education, the networks developed while there often lead to lifetime professional and personal relationships.

[11] Council of Canadian Academies, 2021. Waiting to Connect, Ottawa (ON). The Expert Panel on High-Throughput Networks for Rural and Remote Communities in Canada, Council of Canadian Academies pp. xxvii.

[12] Kunuk, Z. Keynote Interview, April 13, 2022.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Dallas Flett Wapash Focus Group, February 25, 2022.

[15] Lewis, J., and Fragnito, S. (2005). Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace. *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (p. 29).

[16] Adams, K.C. Focus Group, February 25, 2022.
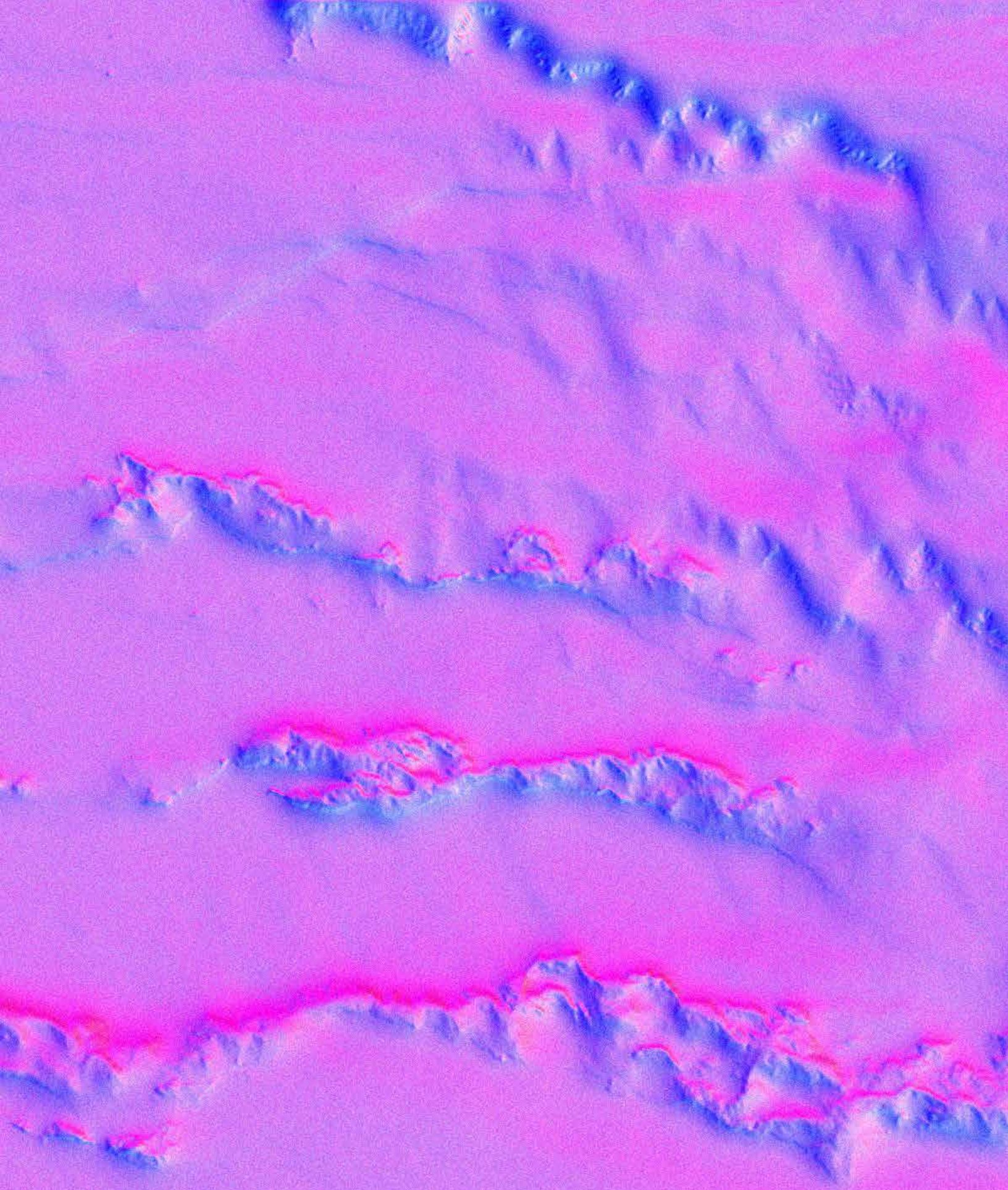
TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION (TRC)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) outlines 94 Calls to Action to facilitate the process of reconciliation. Many of these have to do with essential services, economic development, and self-determination. However, accessing basic services, creating economic growth, and reclaiming self-determination cannot be moved forward without access to the tools most Canadians take for granted, including stable, high-speed internet.

Ensuring equitable access to comparable broadband connectivity for Indigenous people is necessary to address the Government of Canada's fiduciary duty, obligation, and responsibility to advance reconciliation. High-quality connectivity is required to deliver on many of the Calls to Action put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[17]

Digital access means more than the capacity to surf the net. As we navigate an ongoing global pandemic, digital access is an essential service ensuring access to "jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector" so that "communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects" (Call 92) (TRC, 2015a).[18]

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

Passed as a resolution by the United Nations on September 13, 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is intended to "constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world."[19] Under Article 16 of UNDRIP, "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-Indigenous media without discrimination."[20]

While the Canadian federal government did officially sign UNDRIP in 2016, many of its Articles have yet to be addressed. Article 16 has specifically fallen in priority as demonstrated by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC):

"Despite its impact on a range of sectors and outcomes (Chapter 4), broadband connectivity is not mentioned in the ISC's 2021-2022 departmental service plan (ISC, 2021). While broadband connectivity is included in previous departmental service plans, omitting it from the most recent plan suggests it is not a major priority for ISC, despite the increased demand for internet services during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020."[21]

Compounding the lack of action by the federal government in addressing UNDRIP and TRC recommendations, the prioritization of reducing the digital divide is slipping. Efforts to maintain federal fiduciary responsibility and capacity building in partnership with Indigenous communities need to keep pace with Canada's commitment to digital access to mainstream society as core policy.

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[17] Council of Canadian Academies, 2021. Waiting to Connect, Ottawa (ON). The Expert Panel on High-Throughput Networks for Rural and Remote Communities in Canada, Council of Canadian Academies.

[18] Ibid.

[19] UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. indigenousfoundations. (2007, September 13). Retrieved February 10, 2022, from https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/un_declaration_on_the_rights_of_indigenous_peoples/#:~:text=permission%20from%20UNPFII. The%20United%20Nations%20Declaration%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20Indigenous%20Peoples,of%20the%20indigenous%20peoples%20of.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Council of Canadian Academies, *Waiting to Connect*. Ottawa (2021), p38, from https://cca-reports.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Waiting-to-Connect_FINAL-EN_digital.pdf.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

"If we think about the histories of colonialism and what informs those histories...imperialism is invested in owning our stuff and even knowledge. Within imperialist worldviews, to know is to own. So we have to be careful, I think, about what we put out there because it can be taken and misappropriated and used, and even sometimes used against us." [22]

In addition to a lack of digital access within Indigenous communities, digital appropriation of artistic work and knowledge is a source of great concern. As a digital extension of narrative sovereignty, the right to protect Indigenous intellectual property has given rise to the *Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP)* principle. OCAP was created by the First Nations Information Governance Centre in order to "assert that First Nations have control over data collection processes, and that they own and control how this information can be used." [23]

OCAP was initially created as a guide for the *First Nations Regional Health Survey (FNRHS)*, "the only First Nations-governed, national health survey in Canada that collects information about First Nation on-reserve and northern communities." [24] Continuing to grow as a set of ground rules for how Indigenous data can and should be used, the principle has become a standard for many aspects of research, data collection, and intellectual property and is often included as such in legal agreements.

According to many Indigenous artists, sharing creative works digitally is a double-edged sword: the ability for a larger audience to experience Indigenous knowledge production is plagued with the appropriation and plagiarization of works, images, songs, and stories. Beyond self-publishing media online, many Indigenous artists struggle with funders, broadcasters, and production companies wanting ownership of intellectual property in order to have work made.

One artist spoke about how she doesn't "want as an additional company to have ownership over cultural properties. I'm still a little scared of weighing: would it be easier to just not include Cree in it and not be afraid of doing something wrong? But wouldn't it be really sick to have a big platform that has our language on it? And that would make our people happy to see that." [25]

Another aspect of intellectual property concerns how these artists protect themselves against cultural appropriation. During the 2019 Indigital Cultures conference in Ottawa, much of the discussion centred on exactly that. Some participants expressed that some content simply should not be uploaded online or used in digital creation. Others felt that there needed to be additional means of trademarking or copyrighting such materials. Most of the discussion, however, focused on internal stewardship of images, songs, dances, and stories. This content cannot be copyrighted; it doesn't belong to one person but is held and cared for by the entire community or by families. [26]

[22] Blight, S. Keynote Interview, April 19, 2022

[23] The First Nations Information Governance Centre. *The First Nations principles of OCAP®.* (2021, February 26). Retrieved April 10, 2022, from https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/

[24] First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2013

[25] Lightning, K. Focus Group, March 7, 2022

[26] Indigital Cultures. (2019, February 7). Ottawa, ON.

In 2019 the *Statutory Review of the Copyright Act* heard from Indigenous witnesses regarding important issues around intellectual property. Their report offered recommendations which included:

- *The recognition and effective protection of traditional arts and cultural expressions in Canadian law, within and beyond copyright legislation.*[27] *Specifically regarding the use of technological means to protect Indigenous digital intellectual property, the report held the government responsible;*
- *The development of institutional, regulatory, and technological means to preserve traditional arts and cultural expressions, including but not limited to:*
  - *Creating an Indigenous Art Registry;*
  - *Establishing an organization dedicated to protecting and advocating for the interests of Indigenous creators; and*
  - *Granting Indigenous peoples the authority to manage traditional arts and cultural expressions, notably through the insertion of a non-derogation clause in the Copyright Act.*[28]

To date, there has been no movement by the government to follow up on any of these recommendations. Information on Indigenous intellectual property issues has been made available. The Government of Canada does acknowledge that "formal IP protection often requires the identification of a known individual creator(s) or inventor(s) in order to determine the holders of the IP rights. The very concept of 'ownership' in the IP-context may contrast with Indigenous notions of 'ownership' of Indigenous knowledge and cultural expressions."[29] However, movement to incorporate Indigenous values is lacking. These are not issues that we can wait for the government to resolve; as Indigenous artists and organizations, we need to be the ones initiating change in this arena.

[27] Ruimy, D. (Chair) "Indu - Statutory Review of the Copyright Act." *STATUTORY REVIEW OF THE COPYRIGHT ACT*, Report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, June 2019, www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/INDU/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=9897131

[28] Ibid.

[29] Branch, C. and M. (2020, July 20). *Introduction to intellectual property rights and the protection of Indigenous Knowledge and cultural expressions in Canada.* Intellectual Property Strategy. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/108.nsf/eng/00007.html

IDENTITY

Indigenous artists are not only developing digital skills for career purposes; they are using those skills to connect to community and their identity. Art and technology become opportunities to learn about who they are in an ancestral sense, bringing such knowledge back into their contemporary lives. In the digital realm, content can be anything: it can explore both traditional and current contexts.

As one artist put it, "Everyone is still doing traditional arts, like drawing and painting and basket weaving and all these types of things, but with the technology we have today, there's just more opportunity to share traditional knowledge." [30] Another artist spoke about how they were able to "connect with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and family through the artwork." [31]

Filmmakers are not the only ones to reach out to community in this way; artists creating in other digital art forms, including virtual reality, extended reality, augmented reality, and video games, are also using their practice to connect: "I'm making games that are about language revitalization, but also figuring out how I feel about Indigenous issues and my culture and my people and my identity." [32]

While there are myriad reasons Indigenous families have been displaced from community, digital art has helped some artists return to community and have conversations with their families. Beyond personal research into culture, there exists a wealth of new media works that have been co-created between artists and their communities.

Aabijijiwan Media lab openly acknowledges the reality of cultural displacement among their creatives: "Because of intergenerational trauma, because of colonialism, they have been disconnected, and they're on their own journey in their own path to finding their way back to culture and language. There's just so much that they don't know, and because they don't know, because they haven't been exposed, they haven't been in community for those reasons." [33]

[30] Tiewishaw-Poirier, K. Listening Tour Focus Group. March 7, 2022.
[31] Lightning, K. Listening Tour Focus Group. March 7, 2022.
[32] Tiewishaw-Poirier, K. Listening Tour Focus Group. March 7, 2022.
[33] Winters, J. Listening Tour Focus Group. March 3, 2022.

NETWORKING

Seeking and connecting to other Indigenous artists has been identified as a concern of nearly every Listening Tour participant. Artists spoke of how collaboration is the goal, but not one that is always feasible. Many were discouraged by how Covid restrictions resulted in fewer opportunities to network with other Indigenous artists. One artist described how "networking kicked off after imagineNATIVE in 2019,"[34] but then ground to a halt with the pandemic. There was an overall yearning to be in a physical space and meet other artists, though some artists described meeting new friends online and finding opportunities through these virtual channels. Others commented on how online networking enabled them to expand their contacts vis-a-vis "this guy knows a guy who can help us out."

The need to develop a cohesive network where Indigenous artists can find each other, share skill sets or simply discuss their projects is top of the mind across the digital industry. One artist noted that she is "often times the only

Indigenous person in the space and talking about the importance of community inclusion. All of this stuff can almost feel like justifying our existence and so it's just like to not have to kind of be doing that all the time is really nice and obviously part of that is working with people that understand all of that."[35]

Finding community and connecting to other Indigenous creators can make all the difference to whether or not artists even enter into the field of digital production. According to one artist, "I never thought it was an option until seeing that there was a community of Indigenous game developers, and that there were spaces to showcase it that we could go to once we made something."[36]

[34] McArthur, T. Listening Tour Focus Group. February 25, 2022.
[35] Innuksuk, N. Listening Tour Focus Group. November 24, 2021.
[36] Lightning, K. Listening Tour Focus Group. March 7, 2022.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

"Our governance structure is based upon respect and reciprocity, which also honours Indigenous diversity of expression."[37]

While post-secondary institutions in urban areas offer educational programs in digital studies and production, there are very few with contextual and foundational values based in Indigenous culture. Educational barriers–including institutional and systemic obstacles, funding, travel, culture shock, and learning differences–can make it unlikely Indigenous artists will succeed in these programs.

Most artists interviewed learned their digital skills on their own. Some were fortunate enough to find a mentor who would help them. Media labs across the country, generally located within universities, have begun creating dedicated spaces for Indigenous creators: offering workshops and training opportunities specific to Indigenous and other marginalized communities.

For the most part, access to these media labs is free of charge. The need is for a strong team who can advocate on behalf of community they serve with a baseline assumption that this access is essential for operating labs that outreach to the Indigenous community. These spaces are more than just a place to receive training. Many are set up with a space for the children within the area of training. They normalize a family atmosphere where people, mostly women, can be comfortable learning digital skills and know that they can bring their children and be welcome.

In response to the pandemic, many of these workshops have migrated online. Innovative and creative efforts are being made to broaden the reach of these labs and reach out to both urban and First Nation community members. One caveat is whether or not those members have access to the internet and another is whether these members are aware of lab resources on offer. Some labs have gone mobile, travelling into communities to share programming. How else can emerging artists find labs and be found by labs?

[37] Indigenous Matriarchs 4. (2021). https://im4lab.com/im4/.

FUNDING

Funders have only recently begun offering Indigenous-specific funds for the creation of work, namely on a provincial level. All funders who participated in this focus group expressed a need for Indigenous-specific funding and criteria reflecting the needs of community. With arts funders, questions around intellectual property are not an issue because of the criteria for artists to retain creative control over their work. Beyond grant-based funding, artists expressed a need for stable commercial markets for their work.

On a commercial level, accessing broadcast licenses and other forms of funding is a complicated system often requiring an entirely different skill set. Often this level of funding requires the artist to relinquish ownership of their work in order to receive funding. Partnerships with production companies and distributors can require the artist to lose ownership altogether, conflicting with community stewardship.

Beginning circa 2017, the *Indigenous Screen Office*'s (ISO) mission is to advocate and champion Indigenous screen-based storytellers and narrative sovereignty in Canada across all screen platforms. The ISO funds communities, Indigenous companies, and individuals. It also offers capacity building through its sector development program. They also search for ways to reach community: "looking at supporting this kind of approach is a priority

within that...but we are also looking for direction from the community working in these spaces to tell us where the gaps are. Do we need a digital program? Do we need a targeted way of attracting those working in this space? We rely on the community to tell us, to give us that information, that feedback." [38]

Canada Council for the Arts is also making inroads to decolonizing their approach to the Indigenous community. *The Creating, Knowing, and Sharing* (CKS) section of their funding programs is specific to Indigenous practitioners: artists, as well as cultural carriers, can access funds. The definition of an "artist" has been changed to reflect the real-life experiences of Indigenous creators.

A report on the Canada Council for the Arts Research on the Value of Public Funding for Indigenous Arts and Cultures was commissioned to engage with Indigenous artists across Canada and is due to be released in 2022.

The outreach by the Canada Council and the work of the CKS focuses on developing skills and creating new work in the Indigenous community: "Without them we're not achieving our mission, so we can't do anything. Having money is not going to do anything for our community if we don't have people that have the knowledge, and that are on the lens doing what has to be done with the knowledge that they have." [39]

[38] Swanson, K. Listening Tour Focus Group. November 24, 2021
[39] Joanette, O. Listening Tour Focus Group. February 24, 2022.

REFLECTIONS

Throughout the interview process, there were two recurring topics: the connection between the artist's identity and their culture, and the artist's sense of responsibility to community, regardless of their actual relationship.

Identity is deeply connected to expression. Many of the artists felt a need to express themselves in a way that not only demonstrated community connection but also illustrated that community under the true lights of colonialism, traditional practices, and pride.

Artists, especially those in urban settings, spoke about how they were either working on identity issues or had worked through them using their art form. Regardless of where the artist is based, their identity was almost always tied to community, culture, and family.

Many had families who had been removed from community for several generations, a barrier directly resulting from colonization. It didn't stop these artists from reaching out to what family they were aware of, making the connection, and trying to build on who they are and what they know. While this struggle is an individual one, it is also a common one. Other artists who are fortunate to have communities close and retained language spoke about how their artistic expression was meant to reclaim and revive their culture for future generations.

Artist after artist spoke about how their struggles led them to who they are now. Viewed collectively, this individual struggle becomes a movement, a wave of people reclaiming knowledge which was taken from them. How can that wave become a tide that washes away the pain and diaspora of the colonizer? How does the tide become an ocean, a connective medium tying Indigenous artists together?

Nearly every Indigenous artist spoke of first working alone, and then reaching out to work with others. Without fail, every single one of them described the difficulty in finding people like them. Some used social media, others used word of mouth, and many asked their cousins. There are some small successes: those who have built circles around themselves to work together. Many still feel isolated: alone in their search, alone in building community, and alone in reclaiming their culture.

Identity and expression of self are the burning passion behind much of the work created by these artists. Whether it is video game development, virtual/augmented/ extended realities, or new modes of experimentation, each controls their narrative based on who they are. Works of passion were most often issues surrounding Indigenous community. Through these works, when asked, many related a strong sense of responsibility.

There is a need to bring stories to light which speak to and reclaim Indigenous experiences and to do this in a way that sheds light on the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada while rejoicing in culture. Some are made as a testament, others as resistance to stereotypes, and many digital stories are made so we won't forget. These stories are used in the same way our ancestors told stories: they are meant to be passed along and hold value, life lessons, history, and language.

Questions of connection, advocacy, and infrastructure around training and education exist outside the realm of most artists. Most skills development is located in urban centres; some are able to access it while others, those with close ties to Indigenous communities, have developed their skills on their own.

Their need is to create art. It is therefore the responsibility of Indigenous organizations to facilitate their connection; to create spaces where they can find one another. These are spaces which reference, reclaim, and revitalize culture and community. Artists recognize the necessity to open and connect bubbles, but it is outside their power as individuals and even collectives to construct.

Among media labs and Indigenous arts organizations that participated in the Listening Tours, each served a particular region. Representatives for these organizations spoke about not only the difficulty of serving their artists but also in keeping their own doors open. They, too, recognize the need to create something bigger than themselves; how can that be done when most are restricted by funding, institutional requirements, or the sheer size of the task?

To say it is up to everyone to do their part is simplistic. There needs to be a concerted effort from not just those who participated in the Listening Tours but from anyone who is in some way connected to Indigenous digital artists. It is the responsibility of festivals, organizations, collectives, and loosely tethered groups in tiny remote communities to reach out and the responsibility of imagineNATIVE to answer the call.

On higher levels, the lack of Internet and the digital gap affecting much of the Indigenous community needs to be accounted for and overcome. We talk a lot about the reclamation of our culture, our language, and our ways of knowing. In the past, we had physical networks and ancestral trails populated by people reaching out to trade, learn, and connect. If we take that model and use all the tools we have at our disposal, perhaps we can unite with each other once again.

Until these digital gaps are addressed, we still have tools to populate our own networking platform. Outreach by mail, phone, whenever we visit each other, whenever we talk to each other; analogue approaches towards digital collectivism. How this information is accessed and who has access needs to be determined by community.

Verification of active and acknowledged membership in community for those people included in the collection could be considered necessary. Turning to the program eligibility criteria of the Indigenous Screen Office would be a good start. Making the collection available as a publication as well as online would help cross the digital divide. Stabilizing and maintaining it as a web and mobile-based platform would be the next step.

The scale of this project to connect Indigenous artists across Canada is immense. The structure of the collection would have to be determined. What would determine eligibility in the collection? How would people identify themselves, could the language be honoured, and could they use their Indigenous names? The initial outreach alone would be daunting. The compilation of artists and contact info would take time. The administration of this database would cost more money than most Indigenous organizations have.

Should the efforts be decentralized? Could every Indigenous digital artist who wanted to be included have the ability to enter their own name? Would there be a system of references allowing those searching for Indigenous artists to ensure they find the right skills for their projects? How would all these questions be answered? Most of all, who would be asking the questions? Who would take on this enormous responsibility? How would it be funded? How would it be maintained?

These questions are not insurmountable. Regardless of the digital divide, their connection to community, or their skill level, Indigenous digital artists have found a way. Nearly every single artist that was interviewed felt a responsibility to community, and every organization with a mandate to serve Indigenous artists offered the same sentiment. Wes Day spoke of how humankind's ventures into the digital world are, in a way, expanding our own consciousness. Opaskwayak Cree Academic Shawn Wilson speaks about how Indigenous reality is based on relationships. How we, as Indigenous people, engage in our reality is based on our relationships to the earth, to our environment, and to each other.

Our responsibility is clear. We need to support each other, but first, we need to find each other. We need to develop a relationship that will change our realities. Regardless of the means, we need to work together for the benefit of all communities.
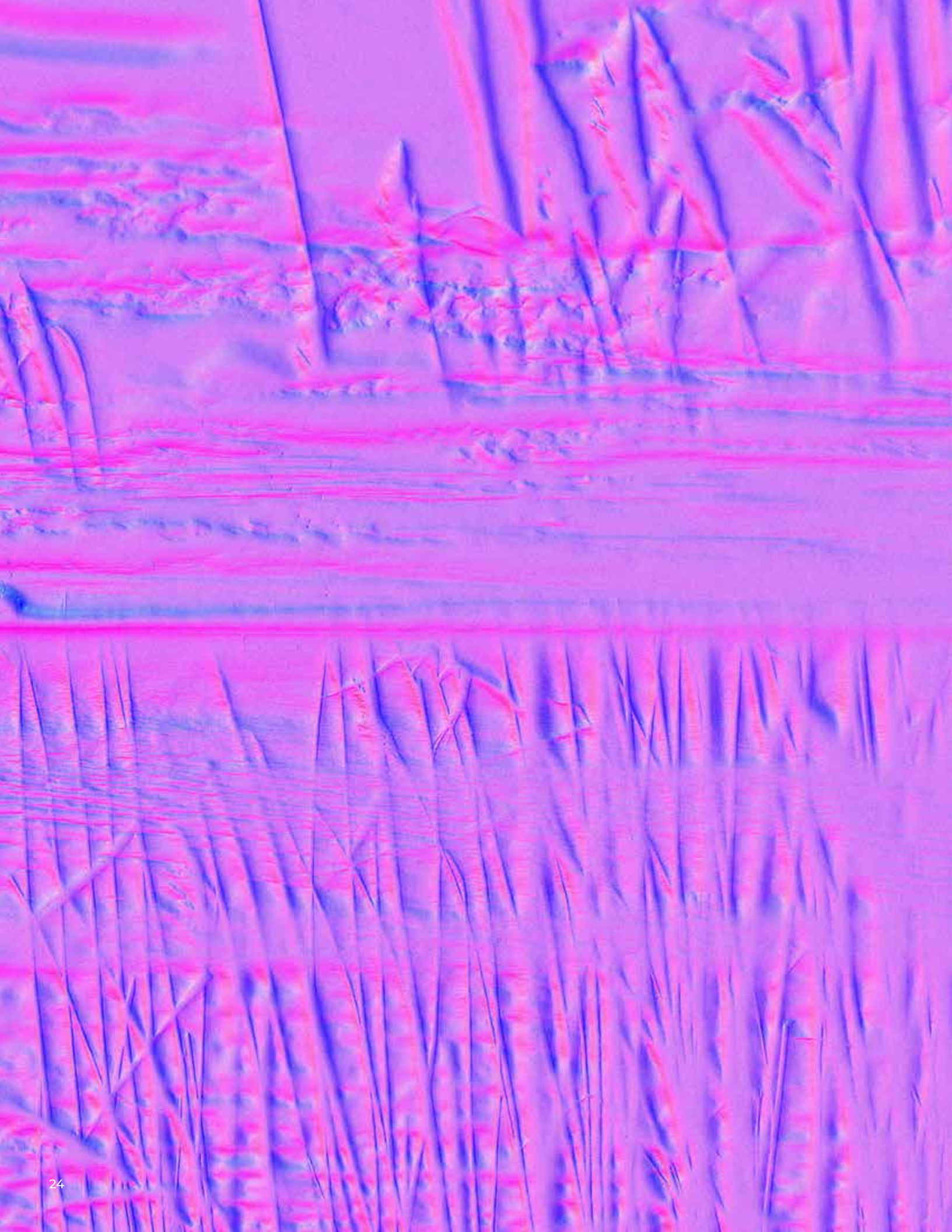
RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several recommendations which arose from the research. Many of the issues discussed highlighted high-level problems requiring governmental intervention. If the Indigenous digital sector is going to move forward, we can't wait around for the government to fix it. The question then becomes: what can individual artists do, and what can Indigenous organizations do? What can community as a whole do to develop the digital sector not just as an essential service but as a virtual world where we claim sovereign space?

The following represent actionables for imagineNATIVE and arts organizations of every level.

1. The creation of a network within imagineNATIVE specifically for Indigenous digital creators, pairing like-minded Indigenous artists with complementary digital skills.

2. The development of an advocacy-based organization made up of Indigenous digital creators, where:

    a. Issues of Intellectual Property and cultural appropriation are a priority;
    b. Issues around the digital gap are championed by this organization on all levels of government and access providers;
    c. Indigenous arts organizations are connected to advocacy organizations and groups as partners.

3. Increased outreach and training opportunities for Indigenous people in remote and rural areas outside of urban centres, making technology and digital skills available to them.

4. Existing arts organizations to create more dedicated programming and presentation spaces that focus on supporting, celebrating, and normalizing digital practitioners. This includes the creation of spaces for the incubation and presentation of born-digital works.

5. Creation of Indigenous-specific digital programs developed and administered by Indigenous people within all levels of arts funding organizations.
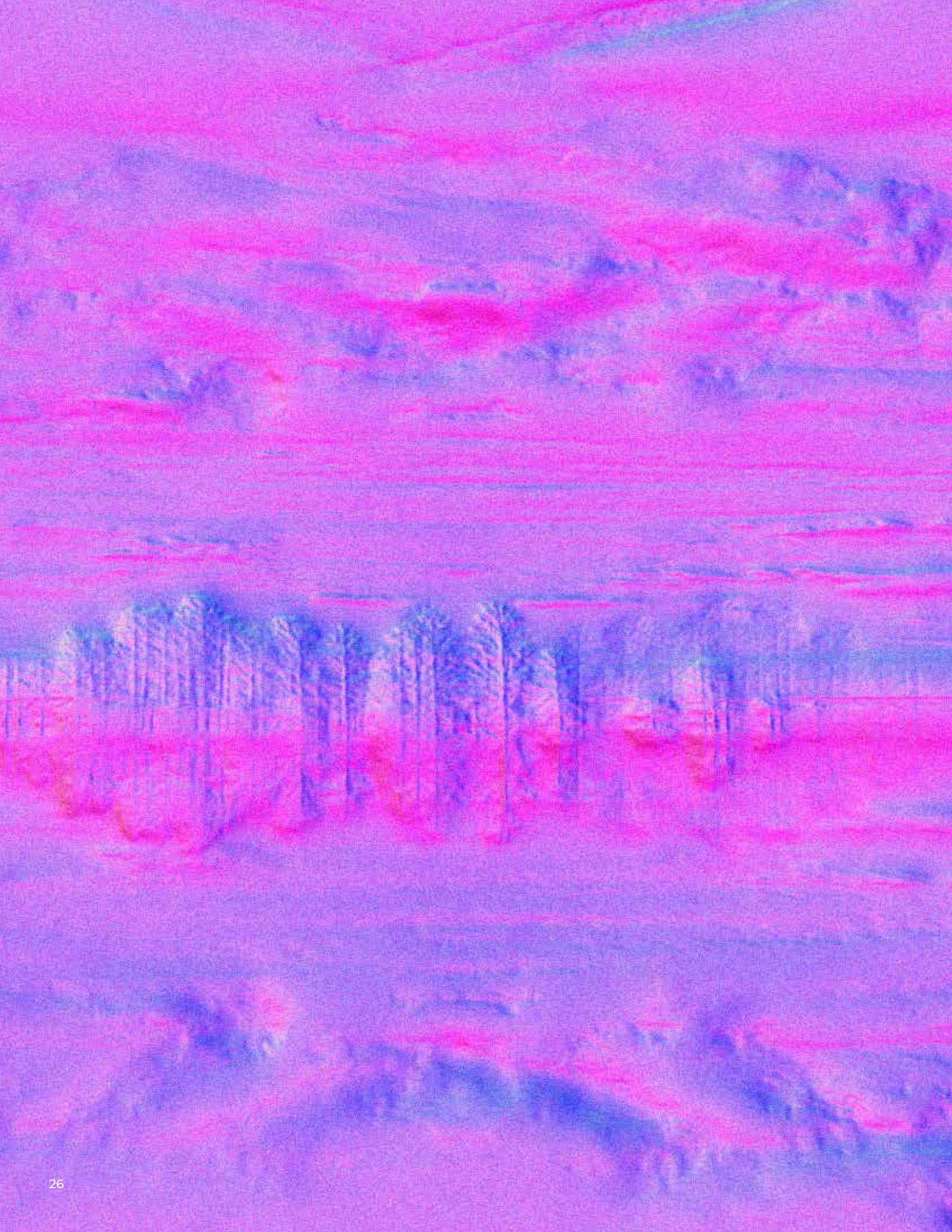
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