

6 Rita Letendre |
Public Art on the Line

Adam Lauder



0

2



Figure 1
Street view of *Sunrise* (1971).
Courtesy the artist.
(opposite page)

Figure 2
Installation of *Sunrise* (1971).
Courtesy the artist.

For years, Rita Letendre’s public art cut radiant vectors across Toronto’s urban grid. After residing in Montreal and California for decades, the artist—who is of Abenaki, Québécois, and Mohawk ancestry—relocated to Toronto in November 1969.¹ Through a combination of public and private commissions for monumental murals and large-scale canvases, Letendre quickly made her mark on the infamously generic public spaces of her adoptive hometown. By the close of the 1970s, her signature “arrow” paintings—iridescent, hard-edge abstractions evocative of Indigenous design traditions—were a daily sight for thousands of Torontonians, and a defiant challenge to the longstanding “construction of [urban Indigenous people’s] invisibility in public culture.”² Letendre’s murals were painted directly onto windowless exterior walls located directly on property lines, and thus occupying public space.³ As such, they exposed and reclaimed those proprietary boundary lines, rendering visible—and subtly intervening in—colonial systems of enclosure and dispossession. Yet, through a combination of misadventure and structural neglect, Letendre’s once ubiquitous and cherished public art works soon began to disappear, beginning with *Sunrise* (1971), her dazzling, seven-floor mural for Ryerson’s Neill-Wycik residence. It was permanently obscured when an adjacent twenty-five-storey residential tower was erected in 1978,⁴ leaving only a ten-inch gap between the two buildings (Figures 1 and 2).

The relational dynamics and defiant liminality of Letendre’s public art demand to be read as acts of Indigenous resistance to a settler-colonial property regime premised on the ideological fiction of “absolute dominion.”⁵ Notions of territorial monopoly theorized by classical Anglo-American liberal thinkers underwrote the 1787 Toronto Purchase and other legal mechanisms asserted by the British Crown, which imposed an exclusive system of land division on pre-existing tenure arrangements exercised by the Mississaugas of the New Credit and other Indigenous peoples. In contrast, Indigenous conceptions of land tenure are adaptive and social, embodying a “relational cosmology in which the lifeworld—the landscape—is a socially interconnected process of engagement.”⁶ The Algonquian-speaking peoples of Canada, which include the Abenaki, specifically “tend to conceptualize their environment as a dense network of interactions structured by patterns of practice that do not really

delineating nation state capitalism

8



Figure 3
Installation view of *Sunforce*
(1965). Courtesy the artist.

0

discriminate between nature and society.”⁷ The plasticity of Indigenous notions of territory persists today in the flexibility of urban Indigenous communities that are constituted as “fluid networks based on relationships,” in which women typically play prominent roles.⁸ This elasticity and relationality characteristic of Indigenous spatial practices is in striking contrast to the absolutism and reified boundaries associated with concepts of landed property in Western, and particularly Anglo-American, legal contexts.

As material and symbolic interventions in the network of property lines that inscribe the “scalar condition” of settler-colonialism on lands which have come to be designated by an anglicization of the Mohawk word *tkaronto*,⁹ Letendre’s public art works are remarkably prescient manifestations of an increasingly urgent demand to respect non-Western understandings of land and territory. Yet, despite the strategic liminality of Letendre’s manifestations of Indigenous presence—their unconcealed occupation of interstices in an urban grid that might otherwise become invisible—Letendre’s public art works are no mere “cracks in modernity.”¹⁰ Rather, they bring into visibility a distinctly modern (and specifically modernist) modality of Indigeneity.¹¹ As formally innovative expressions of cultural hybridity, Letendre’s public art works discover a compelling parallel in the discrepant Neo-Plasticism of Leon Polk Smith, an American painter of part-Cherokee ancestry whose mature, multi-panel abstractions were inflected in equal measure by the tenets of Piet Mondrian and the lived “philosophy” of his Indigenous family and childhood neighbours in Chickasha, Oklahoma.¹² Letendre and Smith alike exemplify emergent forms of “Indigenous cosmopolitanism” under transnational conditions.¹³

Letendre’s public art was a highly visible counter to a then pervasive perception that “Native people in Toronto are conspicuous by their anonymity.”¹⁴ Letendre’s interventions in urban space can be likened to the work of Indigenous women in Seattle who “seized opportunities to fill and reclaim [spaces made] newly available” through processes of urban renewal; like her American counterparts, Letendre “symbolically reclaimed that colonized space.”¹⁵ There is a long tradition of Indigenous women in Toronto capitalizing on their newfound social mobility to “promote positive pride in Native cultural identity in the city.”¹⁶

2

The titular sunrise of Letendre's luminous Ryerson mural may be a nod to the artist's Abenaki heritage. Scholar and tribal member Jeanne Morningstar Kent notes that "Dawn is special to the Wabanaki [a Confederacy of five northeastern nations including the Abenaki] because we are the 'People of the Dawnland,'" a reference to the territory where sunlight first reaches North America each morning.¹⁷ The titles of other Toronto-area public art works by Letendre—notably *Tecumseth* (1972) and *Irowakan* (1977)—likewise gesture toward this personal history.¹⁸ Duane Linklater, a contemporary artist of Omaskêko Cree ancestry whose projects have excavated subterranean narratives of Indigenous presence and resilience, has recently interpreted the disappearance of Letendre's Toronto public art works as a symptom of Indigenous peoples' historic dispossession.¹⁹ Yet Letendre herself is wary of being pigeonholed, or misrepresented by non-Indigenous commentators.²⁰ When asked about her identity, she answers evasively, "I am myself, Rita."²¹

Wanda Nanibush, Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), has argued persuasively for recovering Letendre's Indigenous roots, tracing the artist's high-contrast palette and recurring arrow and wedge motifs to "a long Indigenous lineage of abstraction."²² The "endless dualism"²³ radiated by Letendre's hard-edge paintings is notably reminiscent of the symmetrical foundations of Abenaki design.²⁴

Interpreted through an Indigenous lens, Letendre's signature arrow motif might symbolize "direction."²⁵ Perhaps Letendre's vectors allude to the trajectories of urban migration pursued by Indigenous peoples simultaneously harassed and lured by the forces of modernization.²⁶ Indigenous women were historically overrepresented in urban migrant populations due to a clause in the Indian Act that, prior to a 1985 revision, stripped those who married non-status or non-Indigenous men of their Indian status.²⁷ Alluding to these migrations, Letendre's interstitial public art manifests a decolonial "remapping" of Western cartographic fictions.²⁸ The most compelling example of this strategy of immanent remapping was *Urtu* (1972): painted on a highly visible exterior wall of Stanley Hurowitz's law office at 142 Davenport Road, the mural's eye-catching "arrow" motifs indexed the Indigenous trail that preceded the colonial thoroughfare, whose non-linear trajectory marks a rare departure today from Toronto's gridiron plan (Figure 7).²⁹

But the artist's explosive vectors are every bit the cosmic trajectories of a dawning space age as they are the enduring signposts of non-Cartesian terrestrial placemaking and wayfinding practices. Indeed, Letendre's "arrow" series was inspired by the Apollo moon landing.³⁰ This otherworldly orientation aligns Letendre's arrow paintings with a broader "1960s 'cosmic' zeitgeist" associated with the experimental films of Michael Snow and the visionary media speculations of Marshall McLuhan, thus situating Letendre as an important precursor of more recent Indigenous futurisms.³¹ The hard-edged "constellations" of Leon Polk Smith come to mind again, their celestial allusions as well as the "trajectory[ies]" traced by their multi-panel configurations.³² Much as Smith imagined his paintings as "going beyond the earth," Letendre's "arrows" are suggestive of a cosmic space that exceeds the bounding frame of the canvas.³³ Like Smith's "alternative geometry," the vectorial boundlessness of Letendre's arrows constitutes an alternative to the rational matrix of dominant formalisms, and their tautological citation of the framing edge.³⁴

If the cosmic aspirations of 1960s' artists were symptomatic of a generational quest for identity, the "one-way trip" described by Letendre's ballistic abstractions clear a path for the unilateral orientation of the artist theorized by contemporary thinker François Laruelle, whose "non-aesthetics" rejects the specular politics of representation.³⁵ Laruelle instead postulates a conjugation of heterogenous conceptual materials consonant with Letendre's canny circumvention of categories. This equalization of positions is generative of a "democracy of thought" ingeniously side-stepping the epistemological boundary politics of disciplinary knowledges.³⁶

This democracy of thought is simultaneously a visual democracy. At first glance, the "unary" condition of Laruelle's perplexing notion of "vision-in-One," by means of which "everything is equalized in immanence," might discourage analogies with what anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has provocatively termed the "multinaturalism" of Indigenous conceptual worlds—the "general economy of alterity" binding human and non-human beings within a shared sociality.³⁷ However, Viveiros de Castro's contention that in Indigenous metaphysics "all beings see [...] the world in the *same* manner" can be correlated to Laruelle's methodology of

“‘seeing’ philosophy,” and its internally inconsistent positions and terminological variations, through the generic vantage of an embodied vision-in-One.³⁸ Both frameworks amount to a perspectivism that is not, however, reducible to the relativism of social constructivist theory.³⁹ In the non-philosophy of Laruelle and the Indigenous conceptual systems described by Viveiros de Castro alike, heterogeneous worlds are accessible via a common posture or stance. Read through the lens of Indigenous perspectivism, the unilateral “beam[s]” of Letendre’s arrow paintings assert a cosmic politics of relational alterity, rather than a mainstream politics of representation.⁴⁰ Visibility as embodied stance is privileged over representational identities grounded in resemblance.

Given these otherworldly associations, it is fitting that, for *Sunforce* (1965) (Figures 3 and 4), her first outdoor mural, Letendre employed an epoxy paint reserved, until then, “mainly for spacecraft engines.”⁴¹ Her choice of a non-traditional medium may have been influenced by the mural’s locale: California State University, Long Beach being situated at the centre of a then burgeoning aerospace industry.⁴² Fortuitously, neither epoxy nor the formidable scale of the seven-by-six-metre *Sunforce* would allow Letendre to use the technique of impastoed facture that had been a trademark of her foregoing, Automatiste-inspired abstractions. This limitation would clear a path for the crisp edges and uniform paint application of the subsequent arrow paintings.⁴³

Sited on an elevated crosswalk spanning two buildings on the Long Beach campus, Letendre’s *Sunforce* powerfully embodies Indigenous conceptions of the sociality of territory. Letendre has stated that, “I chose the wall over the passageway because I want people walking in and out of my painting. It must not be static—it must be dynamic with action and an interaction that continues in the mind of the spectator.”⁴⁴ The dynamic spatiality of *Sunforce* can be correlated with Indigenous concepts of “‘relational’ space” as undivided by the utilitarian and static enclosures of colonial settlement.⁴⁵ Letendre’s public art works excavated and intervened within the latter system of property lines in a manner strikingly anticipatory of the only slightly later emergence of what would come to be termed institutional critique. Notably, Letendre presages Michael Asher’s influential reconfiguration of the framing space of the gallery in his 1970 *Installation* at Pomona College, which “linked previously unconnected spheres of public experience together in unexpected knots.”⁴⁶ Like work produced by a younger generation of institution-critical artists, Letendre’s public art manifested a “pursuit of publicness” that ran counter to a widespread disavowal of civic ideals in the 1960s and after.⁴⁷ Yet, in being located outside the institutional space of the museum, Letendre’s public art works simultaneously expressed a “second tendency [within institutional critique, which] sought to place itself outside of institutionality as such.”⁴⁸ In Letendre’s case, this condition of publicness operated as a refusal of the “museological ghettoization of indigenous artistic modernisms” that threatened to contain and marginalize her practice within colonial discourses.⁴⁹

Letendre’s tactics of proto-institutional critique can be likened to sociologist Julie Tomiak’s theorization of “scale-jumping” as a strategy of urban Indigenous resistance to the spatial scaffolding of the settler-colonial city.⁵⁰ Tomiak explores Indigenous contestations of the naturalization of dominant economies of scale as articulated through a conflation of spatial orders and an insistence that scale “is always inescapably and multiply embodied and emplaced.”⁵¹ Tomiak’s analysis of scale-jumping is pertinent to Letendre’s conflation of private and public scales, as well as her interpellation of mobile spectators—particularly, but not exclusively, in *Sunforce* and *Joy* (discussed below).

Letendre was invited to execute *Sunforce* in conjunction with the 1965 California International Sculpture Symposium, a ground-breaking event whose artist-industry partnerships cleared a path for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art’s renowned Art & Technology Program, contributors to the latter having likewise been selected by symposium curator Maurice Tuchman. It may have been the participation of Kosso Eloul, Letendre’s sculptor husband, that first brought her to Tuchman’s attention, but she also shared the curator’s fascination with science and technology.⁵²

However, growing up in an impoverished family of seven on the outskirts of Drummondville, Québec, a university education was sadly out of the question for Letendre.⁵³ Perhaps the artist’s attraction to new media and techniques—from epoxy paint to computer-aided design and drafting software—can be traced to her father’s

Figure 4 (opposite page)
Rita Letendre painting *Sunforce*
(1965). Courtesy the artist.



2

1

2



work as an auto mechanic. An accident in her father's auto shop proved life-altering, sending the three-year-old Letendre to stay with her maternal grandparents for an extended period of convalescence that ended up lasting several years.⁵⁴ This injury also prevented her from studying piano, obliging the artist to channel her lifelong passion for music into her painting.

Letendre's life with her grandparents in Odanak ignited a tireless inquiry into the nature of things that may account for the more prominent sense of structure in her early paintings relative to those of fellow second-generation Automatistes, followers of the revolutionary non-figurative painter and anti-clerical pamphleteer Paul-Émile Borduas. It was Letendre's keen plastic sense that brought her to the attention of Rodolphe de Repentigny, chief theorist of the rival Plasticien movement, who signed his own canvases under the *nom de plume* Jauran. De Repentigny was an early and eloquent champion of the emerging artist. Yet today Letendre is quick to distance herself from his geometric Neo-Plasticism, with its roots in the austere modernism of Mondrian.⁵⁵ As Anne-Marie Ninacs emphasizes, Letendre "remained faithful to the teachings of Paul-Émile Borduas,"⁵⁶ an ardent proponent of "spontan[ity],"⁵⁷ even if she soon broke with his gesturalist technique.⁵⁸

Art historian Sandra Paikowsky notes that the artist's production during the late 1950s was emblematic of a new spirit of pluralism which pervaded the post-Automatiste generation.⁵⁹ Yet Letendre's synthesis of Automatiste gesturalism and Plasticien form was always singular.⁶⁰ Her early disrespect for limiting labels set the stage for an exploration of Zen philosophy, whose *koans*—cryptic exchanges between master and student intended to provoke *satori*, or enlightenment—explode the dualistic constraints of classical Western logic. Zen non-duality may have offered Letendre a framework for negotiating her own lived experience of cultural hybridity, as she explored aerospace imagery and materials in parallel with her Indigenous cultural inheritance.⁶¹ The non-dualism of Zen may also have offered a working model for her boundary-defying public art.

Two of Letendre's most significant public art works—*Sunforce* and *Joy* (Figure 5), her 1978 skylight for Glencairn subway station in Toronto—suggest analogies with the "gateless gate," invoked by Paul Reys in his anthology of Zen parables *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* (1957), as a metaphor for the *koan* as a portal to enlightenment requiring active audience participation.⁶² *Joy* revisited the interactive dynamics of *Sunforce*—its relational address to mobile spectators—in order to reimagine the fluid space of transit animated by the earlier mural on an even grander scale. *Joy* seized upon the subway line as a mobile and public alternative to the static spaces of enclosure whose property lines her earlier works of public art had actively intervened within. The skylight was materially embedded within a fluid infrastructure of publicness. At 54 by 6.4 metres, the majestic Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) subway station skylight—her only publicly funded commission—was justifiably likened to a "cathedral."⁶³ The winning entry in a 1975 open competition, *Joy's* 318 individual airbrushed panels of tempered glass were installed between 1976 and 1977.⁶⁴ If, as Wanda Nanibush observes, Letendre's adoption of the airbrush in 1971 supported her production of "mature colour field abstraction[s],"⁶⁵ *Joy's* luminous, spray-painted canopy actualized the American colour field painter Jules Olitski's seemingly implausible ambition "to spray colour in the air and have it remain there."⁶⁶ But, like the signature "Constellations" of Leon Polk Smith, Letendre's skylight suggested a boundlessness that challenged the formalist tenets of mainstream late modernism while operationalizing a tactical politics of scale-jumping.

Like *Sunforce*, *Joy* defined a vibrant public space of "continuous action" in contravention of the dominant scalar condition of proprietary urban enclosure while simultaneously constituting a powerful testament to the enduring presence, resilience, and creativity of urban Indigenous peoples.⁶⁷ But after years of neglect that had resulted in extensive weather damage, in the early 1990s Letendre insisted that the ruined skylight be de-installed.⁶⁸ *Joy* thereby joined a growing roster of Letendre's public art works that had either been de-installed, destroyed, or obscured: from *Upward Dream* (1980)—a mural commissioned by Omnitown Developments in response to the public outcry sparked by the same corporation's occlusion of *Sunrise*, only to be removed in turn when the masonry of the eastern wall of the Neill-Wycik tower on which it was painted prove faulty—to *Urtu*, which was painted over in the 1990s.⁶⁹ At the time of writing, the current whereabouts of other public

Figure 5
Installation of *Joy* (1978).
Courtesy the artist.
(opposite page)

4



Figure 6
Installation view of *Rita Letendre | Toronto Public Art*, 2018.

Figure 7 (opposite page)
Street view of *Urtu* (1972),
Courtesy the artist.

1 paintings—including the six-metre-wide *Now* (1971), commissioned by Greenwin Corporation for its Berkshire House residential and office complex at Eglinton and Yonge—remain unknown.⁷⁰ The monumental (3.1 by 15.6-metre) 1974 canvas *Irowakan*, originally installed in the lower banking floor of the Royal Bank Plaza in Toronto’s financial district, has fared better (though it, too, is no longer to be found in Toronto): after being transferred to Royal Bank’s Montreal office at Place Ville-Marie in 1985, it was acquired by the Joliette Art Museum in 2004.⁷¹

There are, however, encouraging signs of resurgence. Letendre’s *Daybreak* (1983), which hung for many years at Toronto General Hospital, is centre-stage in the AGO’s new J.S. McLean Centre for Indigenous & Canadian Art.⁷² *Rita Letendre | Toronto Public Art*, an exhibition focused on Letendre’s public art in Toronto that I organized for YYZ Artists’ Outlet in spring 2018 (Figure 6), reunited the recently restored *Sunrise II* (1972), an imposing sequel to the obscured Neill-Wycik mural originally installed in the lobby of Greenwin Square on Bloor Street, with *Ixtepec* (1977), the basis for Letendre’s forthcoming reinterpretation of her 1978 skylight for Glencairn subway station, tentatively slated for completion in 2020.⁷³ If Letendre’s occluded *Sunrise* remains a potent symbol of colonial states’ forced enclosure of Indigenous peoples, her public art simultaneously embodies the potential for boundary-defying interventions within the proprietary spatial scaffolding of cities to illuminate and contest those same forces of domination.

Endnotes

1 Georgiana Uhlyarik, “Letendre in Toronto,” in *Rita Letendre: Fire & Light*, ed. Wanda Nanibush and Georgiana Uhlyarik (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2017), 86.

2 Dara Culhane, “Their Spirits Live within Us: Aboriginal Women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver Emerging into Visibility,” in *Keeping the Campfires Going*, ed. Susan Applegate Krouse and Heather A. Howard (Lincoln, NE; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 76.

3 The Ontario building code stipulates that buildings cannot have windows on the property line to stop the spread of fire between properties. See *The Ontario Building Code*, “3.2.3.1. Limiting Distance and Area of Unprotected Openings.”

4 See Gunda Lambton, *Stealing the Show: Seven Women Artists in Canadian Public Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 56.

5 Scott Prudham and William D. Coleman, “Introduction: Property, Autonomy, Territory, and Globalization,” in *Property, Territory, Globalization: Struggles over Autonomy* (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2011), 8.

6 See Susan M. Preston, “Lifeworlds and Property: Epistemological Challenges to Cree Concepts of Land in the Twentieth Century,” in *Ibid.*, 60. Similarly, Surrallés and Hierro write that “[Indigenous] ‘relational’ space is not a space divided into zones of utility.” Alexandre Surrallés and Pedro García Hierro, “Introduction,” in *The Land Within: Indigenous Territory and the Perception of Environment*, ed. Alexandre Surrallés and Pedro García Hierro (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2005), 11.

2



7 Philippe Descola, "Ecology as Cosmological Analysis," in *Ibid.*, 30.
 8 Susan Lobo, "Urban Clan Mothers: Key Households in Cities," in *Keeping the Campfires Going*, op. cit., 1.
 9 Prudham and Coleman, "Introduction," 5.
 10 *Ibid.*, 3.
 11 See Harney and Phillips's discussion of "modern indigenous art histories." Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips, "Inside Modernity: Indigeneity, Coloniality, Modernisms" in *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*, ed. Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 3.
 12 Leon Polk Smith, quoted. in John Yau, "Leon Polk Smith's Alternative Geometry," in *Leon Polk Smith* (Lisson Gallery, 2017), 14.
 13 Maximilian C. Forte, "Introduction: Indigeneities and Cosmopolitanisms" in *Indigenous Cosmopolitans: Transnational and Transcultural Indigeneity in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Maximilian C. Forte (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 11.
 14 A. Rodney Bobiwash, "Native Urban Self-Government in Toronto and the Politics of Self-Determination," in *The Meeting Place: Aboriginal Life in Toronto*, ed. Frances Sanderson and Heather A. Howard-Bobiwash (Toronto: Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, 1997), 84.
 15 Mary C. Wright, "Creating Change, Reclaiming Indian Space in Post-World War II Seattle: The American Indian Women's Service League and the Seattle Indian Centre, 1958-1978," in *Keeping the Campfires Going*, op. cit., 127, 130.
 16 Heather A. Howard, "Women's Class Strategies as Activism in Native Community Building in Toronto, 1950-1975," in *Keeping the Campfires Going*, op. cit., 127. Wright, "Creating Change," 106.
 17 Jeanne Morningstar Kent, *The Visual Language of Wabanaki Art* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014), 49.

18 Originally installed at the Sheridan Mall in Pickering, Ontario, *Tecumseth* paid tribute to Tecumseh (1768-1813), an early advocate of pan-tribal sovereignty and military leader of the Shawnee—like the Abenaki, an Algonquian-speaking group. *Irowakan* is representative of a group of canvases from the 1970s with titles inspired by Letendre's memories of Abenaki names for other Indigenous nations.
 19 See Linklater, quoted in Adam Lauder, "'The World Must Have Poetry': Rita Letendre's Public Art Interventions," *Canadian Art* 32, no. 4 (2016): 116.
 20 See "Painter Rita Letendre on her Work in 1969," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 28 December 1969, <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/896872003631>.
 21 Letendre, quoted in Lambton, *Stealing the Show*, 51.
 22 Wanda Nanibush, "Rita Letendre: Fire & Light," in *Rita Letendre*, op. cit., 20.
 23 Letendre quoted in Sandra Paikowsky, "Rita Letendre," in *Rita Letendre: The Montréal Years 1953-1963* (Montreal: Concordia Art Gallery, 1989), 30.
 24 "To guarantee symmetry in our designs, thin pieces of birch bark were folded several times and then bitten, creating small punctured holes. [...] Folding the bark in this way is similar to the way people create cut-paper snowflakes." Kent, *The Visual Language of Wabanaki Art*, 24-25. The "acute black ray" that anchors many of Letendre's arrow paintings recalls the "dark surface" of "spring-peeled birch bark" or the "black broadcloth" of woodland clothing that served as the supports for much Abenaki expression. Anne-Marie Ninacs, "The Teaching of Life," in *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour* (Québec, QC: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2003), 134; Kent, *The Visual Language of Wabanaki Art*, 40, 27.
 25 *Ibid.*, 47.
 26 See Susan Applegate Krouse and Heather A. Howard, "Introduction," in *Keeping the Campfires Going*, op. cit., xvi. "While some felt the coercive nature of modernity, for others, modernism held emancipatory possibilities." Harney and Phillips, "Inside Modernity," 10.
 27 See Krouse and Howard, "Introduction," xiii.

- 28 Harney and Phillips, "Inside Modernity," 9.
- 29 Uhlyarik, "Letendre in Toronto," 98; Kay Kritzwiser, "Old Brick, Boldly Brought Back to Life," *Globe and Mail*, 15 July 1972, 24.
- 30 "The force of life is marvelous to me. We see the same force in the sea, the sun, all around us. It is the same strength that makes human beings dream—to want to go to the moon—to accomplish the impossible." Letendre, quoted in Elise Emery, "'Sunforce,' 1965," *Press Telegram* (Long Beach), 21 July 1965.
- 31 David Tomas, *Vertov, Snow, Farocki: Machine Vision and the Posthuman* (New York; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 118.
- 32 Yau, "Leon Polk Smith's Alternative Geometry," 8, 7. Smith's references to astronomy parallel Letendre's scientific interests, discussed below.
- 33 Smith, quoted in Yau, "Leon Polk Smith's Alternative Geometry," 12. Yau argues that Smith "was not interested in having the painting's physical shape and interior form be identical." *Ibid.*, 7.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 7, 11.
- 35 Ninacs, "The Teaching of Life," 136; François Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction: A Non-Standard Aesthetics*, trans. Drew S. Burk (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2012), 1.
- 36 John Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts Are Equal: Laruelle and Nonhuman Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 144.
- 37 François Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013), 16; Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts Are Equal*, 226; Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectivism and Multiculturalism in Indigenous America," in *The Land Within*, op. cit., 37, 39, emphasis in the original. Although the Indigenous peoples of Amazonia are Viveiros de Castro's primary subject matter, he generalizes his conclusions to the Ojibwa of Canada. See Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectivism and Multiculturalism," 44.
- 38 Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectivism and Multiculturalism," 53, emphasis in the original; Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 16. "Amerindian perspectivism proceeds along the lines that the *point of view creates the subject*; whatever is activated or 'agented' by the point of view will be a subject." Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectivism and Multiculturalism," 50, emphasis in the original.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 40 Ninacs, "The Teaching of Life," 135; Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectivism and Multiculturalism," 42. Letendre's non-representational tactics could be likened to Maggie Tate's reading of Rebecca Belmore's movement "beyond the representational function of art." Maggie Tate, "Re-Presenting Invisibility: Ghostly Aesthetics in Rebecca Belmore's Vigil and The Named and the Unnamed," *Visual Studies* 30, no. 1 (2015): 30.
- 41 Lambton, *Stealing the Show*, 55.
- 42 See Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Salvioni, eds., *Art, Women, California 1950-2000: Parallels and Intersections* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Rachel Rivenc, *Made in Los Angeles: Materials, Processes, and the Birth of West Coast Minimalism* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2016).
- 43 Anne-Marie Ninacs attributes the mutations in Letendre's practice that led to the "arrows" to the artist's association with the Tamarind printmaking workshop upon arriving in California. See Ninacs, "The Teaching of Life," 134; see also Lambton, *Stealing the Show*, 55.
- 44 Letendre, quoted in Emery, "Sunforce." Letendre's mobilization of the spectator can be likened to the influence of dance choreography on the work of fellow Automatiste Françoise Sullivan, who studied at the Franziska Boas School of Dance, where she also hung the inaugural exhibition of the Automatistes in January 1946, entitled *The Borduas Group*. See Roald Nasgaard, "The Automatiste Revolution in Painting," in *The Automatiste Revolution: Montreal, 1941-1960* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009), 44. Produced and performed as part of an Art Gallery of Ontario residency concurrent with the Wanda Nanibush-curated retrospective *Rita Letendre: Fire & Light*, Tanya Lukin Linklater's 2017 *Sunforce* powerfully dramatized the choreographic resonances of the painter's practice.
- 45 Surrallés and Hierro, "Introduction," 11.
- 46 Alexander Alberro, "Institutions, Critique, and Institutional Critique," in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA; London, UK: MIT Press, 2009), 4.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 3. Although the divestment from public institutions discussed by Alberro and Stimson ran parallel to a longer trajectory of postwar reactionary politics culminating in neoliberalism, their particular focus is an art world that remained by and large tethered to the (public) institution of the museum due to the anomalous longevity of the modernist project as a dominant paradigm in the arts, but which, by the late 1960s, was also characterized by progressive countercultural currents that nonetheless involved a turning away from the public sphere. See also Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- 48 Blake Stimson, "What Was Institutional Critique?" in *Institutional Critique*, op. cit., 35.
- 49 Harney and Phillips, "Inside Modernity," 13.
- 50 Julie Tomiak, "Unsettling Ottawa: Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Resistance, and the Politics of Scale," *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 25, no. 1 (2016): 9.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 52 See Lauder, "'The World Must Have Poetry,'" 118.
- 53 See Paikowsky, "Rita Letendre," 6.
- 54 See Lambton, *Stealing the Show*, 51.
- 55 "While Letendre herself did not subscribe to de Stijl flatness, the tempering of illusionistic space was certainly important for attaining harmonious colour juxtapositions and her increased use of white provided a new type of spatial field." Paikowsky, "Rita Letendre," 15.
- 56 Ninacs, "The Teaching of Life," 136.
- 57 Paul-Émile Borduas, "Refus Global," in *Refus global et autres écrits: essais*, ed. André-G. Bourassa and Gilles Lapointe (Montreal: l'Hexagone, 1997), 72.
- 58 Letendre's dalliance with Neo-Plasticism can be likened to the formative influence of Mondrian in the development of Leon Polk Smith's "Constellations." See Yau, "Leon Polk Smith's Alternative Geometry," 11-12.
- 59 See Paikowsky, "Rita Letendre," 19.
- 60 It is Letendre's colourism, and the interactivity of works such as *Sunforce* and *Joy*, that aligns her work with a generation of "post-Plasticiciens" who "pursue[d] new colour-based, dynamic ways of engaging the viewer," notably Guido Molinari and Claude Tousignant. Roald Nasgaard, "The Plasticiciens and Beyond," in *The Plasticiciens and Beyond: Montreal, 1955-1970* (Markham, ON: Varley Art Gallery of Markham; Québec, QC: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2013), 14.
- 61 Paikowsky dates the beginnings of Letendre's investigation of her Indigenous heritage to 1961: "It was at this time that Letendre became more interested in her own aboriginal Indian origins which she has said was prompted by her new interest in Mexican and Pre-Columbian art." Paikowsky, "Rita Letendre," 29. See also Homi K. Bhabha, "Hybridity," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), 206-209.
- 62 See Paul Repts and Nyogen Senzaki, "The Gateless Gate," in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle, 1998 [1957]), 89-131. Anne-Marie Ninacs refers to Letendre's annotated and well-used copy of Repts's text. Ninacs, "The Teaching of Life," 137.
- 63 See Lambton: *Stealing the Show*, 50, 61; Jeanne Parkin, quoted in *Ibid.*, 60.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 61.
- 65 Nanibush, "Rita Letendre," 18; see also Ninacs, "The Teaching of Life," 135.
- 66 Kenworth Moffett, "The Sculpture of Jules Olitski," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, no. 8 (1969): 367.
- 67 Letendre, quoted in Emery, "Sunforce." A. Rodney Bobiwash observes that "[Indigenous] people have continuously occupied the Toronto area for about 11,000 years." Bobiwash, "Native Urban Self-Government in Toronto," 7.
- 68 "Procurement Authorization: Glencairn Skylight Replacement, Contract A11-5;" Toronto Transit Commission, July 12, 2017, https://www.ttc.ca/About_the_TTC/Commission_reports_and_information/Commission_meetings/2017/July_12/Reports/7_Procurement_Authorization_Glencairn_Skylight_Replacement_C.pdf.
- 69 See Uhlyarik, "Letendre in Toronto," 98.
- 70 See *Ibid.*, 96. Toronto area public art works by Letendre that are currently missing in action include two commissions by J.D.S. Investments: the 1972 *Tecumseth*, originally installed at the Sheridan Mall in Pickering, and a series of paintings installed at 1000 Finch Avenue West. See Lambton, *Stealing the Show*, 57.
- 71 See *Ibid.*, 59; Uhlyarik, "Letendre in Toronto," 104.
- 72 Lambton, *Stealing the Show*, 63.
- 73 See "Glencairn Station - Skylight Replacement: August 2017 to March 2019;" Toronto Transit Commission, 2017, https://www.ttc.ca/Service_Advisories/Construction/Glencairn_skylights.jsp. The YYZ exhibition, for which an earlier version of the present text was originally written, temporarily reactivated the publicness of Letendre's Toronto public art as a speculative space of remembrance, reconciliation and futurity.



delineating nation state capitalism