

Zachery Cameron Longboy

Guardian of Sleep, 2022

Two-channel video installation: 11:19

“The make believe of life is safely locked away and hidden under a Dress called me. A time of speculation.”

Zachery Cameron Longboy 🙌

Born from a dream the artist had where he led a parade out of the forest, *Guardian of Sleep* is a layered, collaged, digital diary of filmed and found footage, performance, and animations. Just as in dreams themselves, these fragments manipulate, twist, and morph into each other. As you move into Longboy's dream space, think of the messages that come to you through the medium. What did last night's slumber tell you?

At times the act of dreaming can stop, indicating a shift in one's physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual well-being. *Guardian of Sleep* is a reminder of the interconnectedness of these states. In Longboy's dream, humans morph into caribou, petroglyph-like drawings warp and ascend into the space around them, and fragments of experiences are faint and can no longer be recalled without questioning one's senses. Speculations, fractures, and their meanings are simultaneously revealed, interpreted, and locked away and hidden.

These visual and sonic dream fragments from *Guardian of Sleep* were created on Longboy's cellphone, the latest work in his video and performance-based arts practice spanning from the 90s to present. Made during the pandemic as part of the residency *Viral Interventions*,* imagery of pills and viruses spread throughout the video, emphasizing the complex relationship between our shared environment and experiences of chronic health conditions, including the impact on bodies, individuals, and communities.

Consider the caribou and their interconnected relationship to land and the Sayisi Dene. The Sayisi Dene, whose territory extends over what is now known as northern Manitoba and southern areas of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, use their deep, traditional knowledge of the natural environment and leave hunted caribou to freeze outside. This sight, once photographed and published by the media in 1956, led to a series of events where the federal government forcibly removed the Sayisi Dene from their traditional territory.

This forced and unexpected removal to an urban area on the outskirts of Churchill, Manitoba with little to no means of survival brought a loss of culture, economy, language, and traditional ways of life. In *Guardian of Sleep*, the viewer witnesses an abundant ocean of projected caribou wash over the screens. These mystical beings of considerable significance remind the viewer of the interdependent relationship that animals have with humans, the environment, and life itself.

Not only speaking to strength and survival, *Guardian of Sleep* also celebrates community, kinship, joy, and pride - a reminder to be unabashedly true to oneself. In the video, hearing the young child say that the Pride parade is one of the best days of their life reinforces the impact that openness and honesty about sexuality, gender, and the body have for future generations. Longboy's history of work has contributed to and led the way for these discussions. His work invites viewers to question the assumptions we have and how they relate to individual and collective well-being and care.

Many of Longboy's drawings include honest depictions of bodies that help destigmatize what can be taught and internalized as shameful. Beings that blur boundaries between genders and sexes, disregarding any roles or norms of masculinity and femininity to create a new tribe. Our bodies guide our experience of the world and, most importantly, hold our thoughts and spirit. With *Guardian of Sleep*, Longboy gives us glimpses into his own and opens a portal for others to move through, encouraging viewers to listen, look, experience, feel, and dream.

* The screened video component of *Guardian of Sleep* was made during the artist's cohort time with the York University research project and residency Viral Interventions during 2021. The three-year project brings together cohorts of artists and activists every month to workshop stories, trade ideas, and create new urgent videos about living with HIV today. Additional sculptural elements and projected video were added later in conversation with the artist.

Alanna Edwards

Education & Engagement Coordinator

About the Artist

Zachery Cameron Longboy is a video maker and performance/installation artist. Born in Churchill, Manitoba of Sayisi Dene lineage, Longboy places his multiple identities as a White-adopted/Native gay/Two-Spirit/Sixties Scoop survivor at the centre of his multidisciplinary practice. His intensely felt, hybridly layered videos often use his complex performance-installations as a departure point. Longboy is nationally honoured and widely shown in Queer and First Nations venues, as well as in public collections at the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Winnipeg Art Gallery, Glenbow Museum (Calgary), and The

Canada Council Art Bank (Ottawa). His work has been screened at numerous locations including The Edmonton Art Gallery, Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY), and Images Festival.

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