

Tuesday, September 7th, 2021

Oki
Tansai
Hello,

I've only ever written one public statement in my life which was last edited and made public on September 8th, 2020. Unfortunately, I wasn't left with much resolution and from the outside it looks as if Contemporary Calgary (CC) still continues on without much sacrifice to their programming and reputation.

I don't know what I expected from them but I was hopeful of being able to handle whatever came my way and freely move on as CC seemingly had. Instead I think it has left me undoubtedly burnt out and I have even thought about leaving the arts. I don't want to give them too much credit for this but they have played a hand in this particular thought process. This past year, I've realized that the hurt they caused will be carried by me for some time and just moving on with my practice doesn't feel right. In the ten years I've been out of art school, I've faced many negative factors but CC has left more than just scars. They left me with an outlook that has shaken me to the roots. With everything that was exchanged between us--the artists--and CC's staff and board, all they could keep repeating was, "We don't know what to do?". I've never been so NOT heard in my life, which is why I'm frightened. I'm afraid of walking into unknowing situations because I don't know if someone is going to hear my voice as an advocate, or if they're just going to take me for granted. These are some of the scars I'm left with, questioning every space I enter is not an easy way of living. The only good that came out of the conversations between CC and the artists I stood with was having a community to lean on between the 6 of us. Our joint strength and courage was the only thing holding me together to safer paths. If I didn't have them I would have not made it through.

Moreover, there are three factors that have added to my unrest and burn out: Contemporary Calgary not finding healthier outlets for action, The Bows for exhausting me as a general board member from February 2019 to June 2021, and, lastly, being consumed by the thought process of being resilient. BIPOC individuals have one quality that I don't think non-Indigenous, non-Black or non-People of Colour actually understand, which is resiliency. This quality isn't only wrapped in empowerment, there's the reality that this trait could potentially exhaust you. I think that's where I'm currently standing, that realization we are only truly resilient if we are heard and have found pathways forward. When we are testing our strengths through resilience, we need that reciprocation of care returned back to us so that we can spring back with new found growth. CC never gave back and I haven't been able to spring back into the artist and person I once was. I'm forced to just carry on remembering that organizations and spaces like these are out there, leading me to feel unwell with the thought of the possibility of their impact on my career. It's tiring and I'm burnt out.

I'm not writing with the judgement of cancelling anyone or looking for either CC or The Bows to follow up with any type of action. That isn't my labour, they would only be adding to the weight I carry if I'm also giving them answers to the wrongs they have done. When I left The Bows board earlier this summer, I wrote in my resignation letter that I do not think it's just for an organization to govern over any part of an art creator's personal life or livelihood. Especially if it could alter any

aspects of the community it serves, those are still truthful words. But something that has been circling for me is whether staying or leaving would have been more beneficial for those that were impacted by The Bows. Or would it have cost my career? I am saddened that recently, people have been impacted by an organization that used my labour to change their name, survive through a pandemic, and move into a new venue. It makes me feel as if my time there was wasted, to be honest. Now looking back, I was the only Indigenous person and only 1 of 3 people of colour during most of my time sitting on that board. The main problem with that type of ratio is when I tested the waters of resiliency, I knew my strength could only reach so far. In my mind, voices like mine are amplified when there's community and at least one other person that is like me: Indigenous. Having other Indigenous voices stand with me and share the load that we carry allows our words, actions and worth to be long-lasting. I've always been raised that my family, ancestors and community are all that I'll have. I'm starting to understand what that means... I needed that type of support when I was a board member and I am full of regret that another organization/institution, like The Bows, yet again made me stand as a singular Indigenous Blackfoot/Cree/Dane-zaa woman.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brittney Namaakii Bear Hat". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Brittney Namaakii Bear Hat