



Barry Ace

1958 –

Bandolier for Niimi'idiwin (Powwow)

velvet, bronze screen, paper, coroplast, metal hardware, capacitors, resistors, light-emitting diodes, glass beads, vintage circuit boards, copper jingle cones, synthetic hair, synthetic sinew, cotton thread, polyester edging bias, red and white trade beads, digital tablet with photographs, 2019

56 × 11 ¾ × 4 ¾ in, 142.2 × 28.9 × 11.1 cm

PROVENANCE

Collection of the Artist

THIS *GASHKIBIDAAGAN* OR bandolier bag is a celebratory work. Its lush palette is high voltage, with shades of pink and electric blue inspired by the bright colours seen in regalia at contemporary powwows (*niimi'idiwin*). The materials are selected by Barry Ace with the specific intention of adding “elements of modernity” to a historic style of bag, often seen in archival photographs and museum collections covered with beaded floral motifs or intricate geometric patterns of the material culture of the Anishinaabeg of the Great Lakes Regions.

Where a wool tassel or beaded and loomed fringe would have previously been incorporated, Ace has added pink synthetic strands that simulate horsehair, to produce the effect of lightness, an “upward motion” or a “rising up.” The hair flows from crimped copper cones, typically used on women’s jingle dance dress regalia. When activated through the movement of dance, the sound produced is distinct—the tinkling of tin on tin cushioned by the soft fabric of the dancer’s dresses. The visual and acoustical result is meant to emit a healing effect to those witnessing the dance. Bandolier bags were most often worn by men but would also be seen worn by women. With the inclusion of the jingles on *Bandolier for Niimi'idiwin*, Ace pays homage to the women dancers.

The construction of earlier bags often included a “secret pocket.” Over time, with the material innovations of the *gashkibidaaganag*, from woven finger-loomed construction up until the mid-19th century to the appliqué beadwork into the early 20th century, the pocket altogether disappears, or is intentionally constructed with an opening too small for a human hand. The false pocket is simply a symbol to represent what came before. In *Bandolier for Niimi'idiwin Powwow*, Ace incorporates his own 21st century adaptation of a *gashkibidaagan* design. Where a pocket may have been, a digital tablet has been embedded. Here though, what is contained in the “pocket” is no secret. The movement of someone coming within an intimate radius of the bag activates, through an embedded motion detector, images of detailed fragments of dance regalia. The images are Ace’s own digital documentation taken during intertribal dances, the moment when everyone, including the audience, is welcomed into the circle to dance together. The tablet cycles through soft focus stop-motion visuals of swirling ribbons and the dancers’ feet lifting up from and back down to the ground. Ace, who danced for many years on the powwow circuit in the men’s Southern Straight and Woodland styles, intentionally focuses on the lower parts of the dancer’s body. He stated: “When I dance, this is what I see, only a six foot radius around me as I focus on the beat, motion and footwork to tell a story, often of hunting or warrior exploits.” This contemporary re-imagining of a *gashkibidaagan* provides the viewer with Ace’s perspective as a contemporary dancer.

The embellishments that connect the simulation of the horsehair to the bag, as well as the floral motifs that whirl around the digital tablet and climb up the strap, are made of electronic components. Round and rectangular circuit boards connect the bandolier bag



to the copper jingles. For the flowers and their leaves, Ace uses electronic resistors and capacitors as well as glass beads, to reference the Woodland floral motifs that became popular on the bags after the mid-1800s when glass seed beads became more accessible with increased trade. The flowers represent medicinal plants, that when danced symbolically emit healing energy. As the function of an electronic component is to store and release energy in a circuit board as needed, for Ace, they are a profound simile for the glass bead (*manidoominens*), meaning “spirit energy berry” in Anishinaabemowin.

The innovations in material and design that Ace chooses to use in his creation of the bandolier are an intentional action resisting the notion of cultural stasis. His interpretation of the *gashkibidaagan* situates his work in the historical line of Anishinaabe innovation in design and celebration of material culture.

Please note: This work is accompanied by a letter of authenticity and provenance signed by the artist.

PRICE: \$28,000

