



h0001 **Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun**

1957 – Canadian Indigenous

**Indian Residential School,
Leaving the Shallow Graves and Going Home**

acrylic on canvas, signed and dated 2022

72 x 96 in, 182.9 x 243.8 cm

PROVENANCE

Commissioned from the Artist through Macaulay & Co. Fine Art
by Dixon Mitchell Investment Counsel Inc., Vancouver, 2022

AS WE APPROACH the one year marker of the uncovering of the remains of 215 children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, we commemorate the devastating loss of these young lives, as well as thousands more, that were robbed of their fate. The locating of these unmarked graves in Tk'emlups te Secwépemc First Nation, announced publicly on May 27, 2021, has been for Canada, a watershed moment late in arriving. At this time, it is imperative to work towards understanding the political and social structures that failed Indigenous children then, and continue to fail them now. It is for this reason, Dixon Mitchell Investment Counsel, with the assistance of Macaulay & Co. Fine Art, have commissioned internationally renowned artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun Lets'lo:tseltun to create a work that casts a light on the shadowed past and present, while offering an opportunity to extend the dialogue and awareness about the National Truth and Reconciliation Day, first commemorated on September 30 of last year. One hundred percent of the proceeds of the sale of the work, titled *Indian Residential School, Leaving the Shallow Graves and Going Home* (2022), will be donated to the Orange Shirt Society (OSS) and the Indian Residential School Survivors Society (IRSSS).

The OSS is a non-profit organization with an imperative “to create awareness of the concept of ‘Every Child Matters.’”¹ Orange Shirt Day was inaugurated in 2013 on September 30. The specificity of the colour originates from the personal account of one of the founders, Phyllis (Jack) Webstad. At the age of 6, upon arriving at St. Joseph’s Mission Residential School (1891–1981) in Williams Lake, British Columbia, her clothing was taken from her, including the “shiny orange shirt” her grandmother had bought for her for the start of the school year.² Webstad has shared, “It had string laced up in the front, and was so bright and exciting—just like I felt to be going to school!”³

Orange Shirt Day, now also the day of National Truth and Reconciliation, is about more than the confiscation of personal belongings. It calls attention to the theft of Indigenous language and culture, along with the fracturing of families and countless communities due to the Canadian Indian residential school system that occurred for over a century from coast to coast to coast.

In Williams Lake, the IRSSS “provides essential services to Residential School Survivors, their families, and those dealing with Intergenerational traumas.”⁴ Over the past decade, Indigenous communities and organizations such as the OSS and IRSSS have become an important part of Dixon Mitchell’s institutional asset management practice. As their connection to these groups has deepened, so have their efforts to give back by supporting



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fundraisers such as this one with Yuxweluptun. He has stated “Colonialism is not a beautiful picture sometimes; it’s an ugly place. I’ve captured the planet in ways that I feel is [sic] important. I paint visionism, not surrealism, and that’s who I am.”⁵

Yuxweluptun is of Cowichan (Coast Salish) descent through his father and Syilx (Okanagan) through his mother. His parents were both residential school survivors who became activists for the rights of Indigenous people, exposing him early in his life to the fraught political landscape of Canada. He was born in 1957, a few short years before individuals registered as Status in accordance with the Indian Act, were given, under Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, the Federal Franchise or right to vote on March 31, 1960. Previously, only those individuals who were voluntarily or involuntarily removed from the provisions of the Indian Act and accorded full Canadian citizenship were allowed to vote. Yuxweluptun’s Western education began at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, and he transferred a few years later to the public school system, which only opened up to Indigenous children in the 1950s. It is this exposure at a young age to the discriminatory policies of the Canadian state, along with the continual witnessing of environmentally devastating practices such as clear-cut logging and resource extraction, that inform the often agitated landscapes we see in Yuxweluptun’s paintings.

The artist uses a palette that pulsates, and subject matter that confronts Canadians with their ongoing collusion with the state. He also injects a wry wit into his work, through titles like *Red Men Watching White Man Fix a Hole in the Sky*, now in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada (NGC). It is paintings such as this that Yuxweluptun has become most recognized for; large-scale



detail



detail



and epic, they demand the viewer's attention. He defines himself as a "history painter,"⁶ and his works are a visual record of contemporary issues set in the unbalanced context of the colonial past; an intentional counter perspective to the history of the victors. As he states, his subjects are: "residential schools, global warming, deforestation, pollution and worldwide concerns such as the hole in the ozone layer; environmentalism" as well as the "humanities, humour, and existentialism."⁷

With an oeuvre not limited to painting, Yuxweluptun also works in sculpture, digital media and performance art, such as "Shooting the Indian Act," which was first performed at Healey Estate, Northumberland, United Kingdom in 1997. His artistic activism, at home and abroad, has profoundly shifted the discourse around issues related to the treatment of Indigenous peoples and the treatment of the land. His position as a contemporary artist is fused with his role as a requisite cultural provocateur. With a career spanning over 40 years, Yuxweluptun's exhibition history is extensive, and his work is in collections such as the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Banff Centre for the Arts, Kamloops Art Gallery and the Canadian Museum of History, as well as many other national and international institutions and private collections.

Yuxweluptun's approach is quintessentially his own, making use of "symbolic forms [that] are interchangeable." As he describes, it is "an old-school style adapted to suit a new era," one that "involves deciding to express or to eliminate the traditional formline particular to Northwest Coast style."⁸ His figures may

include acerbic multinational capitalists with sharp beaks, forked tongues and mouths turned into oozing pipelines. At other times, they are spindly yet elegant, calling to mind shadow puppets with their stilted, seemingly self-conscious movements within the frame. Inside the compositions, shamans, totem animals and guardian spirits engage with each other; holes in their bodies allow access to the view beyond. This aesthetic choice adds a quality of weightlessness, as if allowing them to rise above the burden of history. As a residential school survivor, Yuxweluptun's most recent work reads as acutely personal. In *Indian Residential School, Leaving the Shallow Graves and Going Home*, we see figures that, as the title suggests and the visuals illustrate, are in motion. No longer buried beneath the earth in unmarked graves, they walk upright, traversing a shadowy land denuded of vegetation. They have yet to arrive at their final place of rest, but in the night sky, a crescent moon and twinkling stars are navigational guides, the ones that for millennia, lead back to home.

The commission of *Indian Residential School, Leaving the Shallow Graves and Going Home* and its proceeding auction through Heffel is an occasion to consider the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action under the "Commemoration" section:

79. We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal organizations, and the arts community, to develop a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration.

As Canadians, and as members of the arts community, we can all play a role.

We thank Leah Snyder, digital designer and writer, The L. Project, for contributing the above essay.

1. OSS website link—<https://www.orangeshirtday.org/orange-shirt-society.html>
2. OSS website link—<https://www.orangeshirtday.org/phyllis-story.html>
3. Ibid.
4. IRSSS website link—<https://www.irsss.ca/about-us>
5. Karen Duffek & Tania Willard, *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories*, (Figure 1 Publishing Inc.), 2016, 14.
6. Ibid, 19.
7. Ibid, 7.
8. Ibid, 11.

PLEASE NOTE:

The Consignor Proceeds of sale will benefit the Orange Shirt Society and the Indian Residential School Survivors Society. In addition, Heffel will be donating the Buyer's Premium from this lot to these organizations.

A tax receipt will not be provided for purchase of this lot. This work is not framed.

PREVIEW DATES AND LOCATIONS:

Vancouver Preview: May 25 – June 8 at 2247 Granville Street
Toronto Preview: June 16 – 22 at 13 Hazelton Avenue

ESTIMATE: \$125,000 – 175,000