

# Settler Colonialism and Resistance in the Local Arts Community

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Thank you!

Thank you to the participants for setting time aside to speak with me and for sharing your knowledge. Thank you to Dr. Sy, Eric Willis, my family, boyfriend, and friends for supporting me through this project.

## Preliminary Thesis:

Settler colonialism in the arts communities on unceded ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm) and W̱SÁNEĆ land manifests through a lack of resources, a co-optation of decolonial language, and a retention of colonial power in large institutions. Resistance manifests in a collective braiding of Indigenizing and decolonizing practices enacted by a network of people with a variety of affiliations.

## Introduction

### Research Question

How does settler colonialism, and resistance to it, manifest in the arts communities on the unceded ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm) and W̱SÁNEĆ land colonially known as Victoria, BC?

### Goal

My goal is to study how settler colonialism continues to manifest, and what forms of resistance are happening and possible. I advocate for continued disruption of settler colonialism as it manifests in the arts. This poster will be set in the Clearihue Building to continue to support students understand the current context in the arts.

## Key Terms

**Settler Colonialism:** a form of colonialism (occupation of Indigenous land) that involves intended permanent settler control over land, people, and resources, and disruption of Indigenous life and land (Wolfe, 2006).

**Resistance and Indigenous feminisms:** resistance work happens from a variety of different frameworks and experiences. For example, **Indigenous feminisms** consist of theory and action born out of the experiences, knowledge, and values of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. It is a transformative “critique of the social, economic, and political conditions of Indigenous women’s lives” (Green, 2017, p 17). It embodies one piece of a dynamic, decolonial movement of resurgence that is “principled, self-reflective, and critical” (p.16).

**Decolonization:** A process of dismantling settler colonialism. It “must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted” (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

## Locating the Research

Legacy Art Gallery is the University of Victoria art museum, and is one of the main art galleries in Victoria, BC. It plays an important role in the ecosystem of the local arts communities. This location provides Legacy with a unique vantagepoint, opportunities, and limitations. By interviewing people at Legacy Art Gallery, I hope to be able to learn about how resistance to settler colonialism and fill out an image of the current context for decolonial arts-based work.

I am a settler that grew up on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh land, and on Songhees, Xʷsepsəm, and W̱SÁNEĆ land. From the role that my family and I have in the continued settler occupation of Indigenous land emerges a responsibility to disrupt colonial systems without the promise of settler futurity. I have come to this project by noticing contradictions in colonial institutions’ approaches to address the calls for decolonization. My research is grounded in the belief that decolonization can only happen by recognizing the interconnectedness of systems of power and by centering Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

### Local Context

Settler colonialism have shaped the evolution of arts communities here such that the obstacles and opportunities for resistance have important differences from those globally, and are unique to the ongoing relationships in an urban settler context occupying Songhees, Xʷsepsəm, and W̱SÁNEĆ land. The residential school system, ongoing violence against Indigenous people (especially women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people), and other violent manifestations of the settler occupation lead to a constant fight for survival and sovereignty (Isaac, 2016). Resistance in this context is specific, local, and suits the needs of multiple (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) communities living here (Sandhra, 2025).

### Global Context

This project is focused locally, but it is informed by and operating in a dynamic global context. There is a large body of work on colonialism and decolonization within global critical museology (ICOM). Much of this work is done with post-colonial theory, but scholars working in Canada (not a post-colonial context) have played a huge part in shaping the discipline (McTavish et al., 2017). Decolonization requires a global network of Indigenous groups resisting the colonial regime while still recognizing and acting on their local contexts (Maracle in Fiola, 2013; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Resistance requires recognizing the issues in other parts of the world as related but not identical (Miheesuah, 2003)

## Methodology

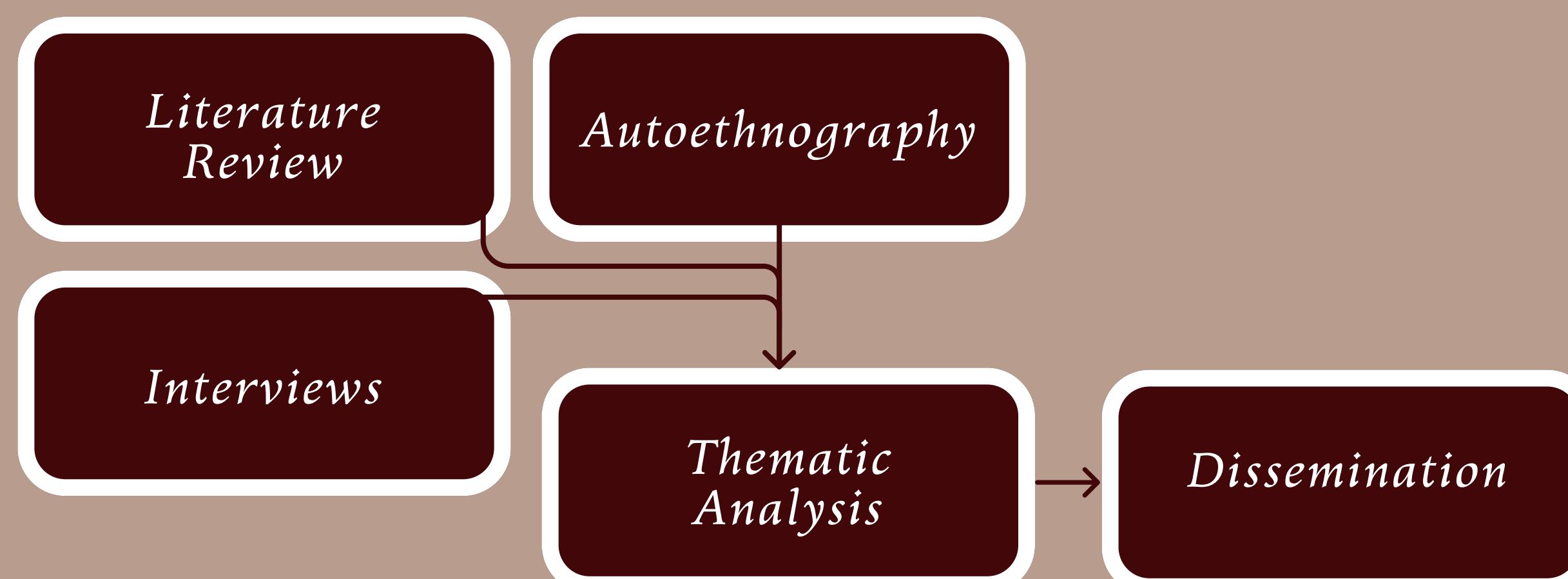
My methodology is devised from a variety of relevant sources; a “thoughtful patchwork” rooted in Indigenous feminist influences and anti-oppressive work.

### Data Collection

- Literature review conducted in critical museology, and in both academic and non-academic sources on postcolonial, decolonizing, and Indigenizing theory related to GLAM
- Feminist interview, transcription, thematic analysis methods (Hesse-Biber, 2014, DeVault and Gross, 2006)
- Autoethnography to recognize and contextualize my role as a researcher with a personal perspective in the research (Forsyth)

### Limitations

This project was centered in colonial institutions, with a research question and process determined by a settler student. I cannot participate in decolonisation, and the research structure reifies colonial research processes (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Rosa, 2020)



## Directions for Future Research

After this project, I hope to see research that:

- contests the boundaries between academia, the arts, and community
- involves not just a recognition of power dynamics but actively takes on a political task of unsettling, decolonizing, and Indigenizing
- disrupts decision-making and cultural power of larger colonial institutions in local arts community
- is performed under community leadership, and Indigenous leadership

Come see an updated version of this poster in the Gender Studies Department once the project is completed!

## Preliminary Findings

Resistance involves a reallocation and re-thinking of power and leadership, returning power to Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Art continues to be undervalued under settler colonialism, leading to low funding, and less opportunities for decolonial work.

Art can heal, bring transformative power, and help build relationships.

Resistance continues to emerge through repatriation, Indigenous art and curatorial practices, and in networks that operate independently from colonial institutions.

## Literature Review

### EMERGING THEMES

- Art has the potential to bring healing, resilience, collaboration, vulnerability, and to decenter colonial narratives and actions (Krpmotich et al., 2013; Isaac, 2016)
- Need for structural change, not just a “politics of recognition” (Coulthard, Wrightson)
- Need to build relationships and opportunities for cross-cultural interactions (Krpmotich et al. 2013; McTavish et al., 2017)
- Continue to need to center Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLBTQIA+ people’s experiences, knowledge, and values (Gearon, 2021)
- Art galleries, museums still need to undergo “paradigm shift” from which there is no guarantee that they will emerge (Krpmotich et al., 2013)

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## Selected References