

# Teresa Marshall

## *Cultural Briefs*, 1996

rawhide, wood, hardware

6 components: 36 x 43 x 9 cm each

Collection of the Vancouver Art  
Gallery, Director's Discretionary Fund  
VAG 97.31.1-6



# Teresa Marshall

*Cultural Briefs*, 1996



Image source: Vancouver Art Gallery Library  
Canadian Artist Files

## Artist's Biography

Nationality: Canadian  
Born: 1962, Truro, Nova Scotia

Teresa Marshall's multimedia sculptures and installations address the ellipses and absences in the dominant Eurocentric version of North American history. Marshall grew up in a bi-cultural military family, partially on the Millbrook reserve, before studying at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, where she won numerous scholarships and academic awards. Since then, she has earned a multitude of project and travel grants and awards from the Canadian Native Arts Foundation, the Canada Council, the Banff Centre for the Arts, and agencies in British Columbia (where she now resides). Since the early 1990s, Marshall has worked extensively as an instructor, juror, visiting artist and lecturer across Canada.

Source: "Teresa Marshall," *An Introduction to Contemporary Native Artists in Canada*. February 16, 2006.  
[http://collections.ic.gc.ca/artists/marshall\\_teresa.html](http://collections.ic.gc.ca/artists/marshall_teresa.html)

## Artistic Context

Nationality: Canadian  
First Nations Affiliation: Mi'kmaq  
Training: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design  
Group: 20th century; 21st century  
Provenance: purchased from the artist in 1996  
Subject: suppressed First Nations' histories

## Other Works in the Vancouver Art Gallery Collection

Teresa Marshall  
*Cultural Brief*, 1996  
rawhide deerskin, wood, metal, leather, horse hair, textile and sinew  
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund  
VAG 96.11.1 a-b

Teresa Marshall  
*Land Escapes*, 1996  
rawhide and wood  
Purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts  
Acquisition Assistance Program  
VAG 97.30.1-4

Teresa Marshall  
*Cultural Briefs*, 1996



## Bibliography

**This Place: Works from the Collection**  
Internal Publication

[transcription]

**This Place**  
**works from the collection**

This exhibition presents more than 90 significant works from the permanent collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, organized into three thematic groupings: the land, indigenous cultures and the self as place. The exhibition focuses on important contemporary and historical artworks by British Columbian artists or by artists who have visited British Columbia and addressed these themes.

The first section, on the subject of the land, presents divergent visions of the land produced from the 1880s to the present. With watercolour, printmaking, painting, photography and sculpture, these artists have created an expansive study of rural and urban landscapes of this province.

The second section addresses historical representations of indigenous cultures from the 1920s to mid-century, as well as the growing body of artworks produced by First Nations artists representing their own cultures within the contemporary world.

The third section presents a survey of artworks that examine notions of the self as formed and defined by place. In this instance, the idea of place is more than the physical geography of a region, it is the place formed by diverse histories of immigration, and within generations of beliefs and ideas, or even by historical art produced from this region.

This exhibition is curated by Bruce Grenville, Senior Curator, Vancouver Art Gallery.



**Topographies: Aspects of Recent B.C. Art**  
Publication  
1996

[transcription]

**Teresa Marshall**  
installation view of  
*Band Stands*  
including  
Cultural Briefs  
Land Escapes  
Moccasin Telegraph  
Talking Sticks  
Warriors

1996  
collection of the artist

Teresa Marshall  
Cultural Briefs, 1996



**Teresa Marshall**

As a child, making mud pies and small snow people at the edge of a slow melting snow bank allowed me to enter a crystalline world. That, like ours, was alive and always in the process of transforming itself. In this world, time was suspended.

At the edge of a brook's universe, I packed sticks and stones, grasses and leaves, into mud huts for the water spirits to play in and bridges for them to cross.

At these places no other world existed, until dinner time.

When bits and pieces of threads and ribbons, beads and buttons, glue and scissors, were spread out over the kitchen table, a similar time of animation unfolded among busy hands, slow stories and frequent laughter.

I had never questioned these occasions or attempted to define them. "Making" led me into these new worlds of play and creation. In "doing," I had many places to visit.

Years later, research led me to stories of our ancestors who lived and shape-shifted among the six worlds.

As an aspiring ancestor, I shift and shape-shift among objects. Some call it art.

When Genievue Julian taught me to make my first pair of moccasins, she sat with a hide across her knees, gently stroking it. She recalled making her first pair as a young girl. The hide, its lines and scarring, like a map, reflected the lived experience of the animal. Made into a pair of moccasins, the spirit of the animal could walk again in our world.

Raw hides, when stretched into drums, could talk again in our world. Serving as mediators, the drum communicates across worlds, in keeping with our oral traditions.

- ENTER: 1942
- ENTER: Christianity
- ENTER: Relocation Act
- ENTER: Indian Act
- ENTER: Technology
- ENTER: 1996
- ENTER:

Not only has the physical environment of the Gaia been disrupted by the progress of industrial production (high technology) and the unbridled working of capital; so has the moral and metaphysical environment of art and thought...

Humanity has no choice but to work out its spiritual and physical fate in the face of this unsympathetic and powerful mechanism...

Throughout this disordered century of "high" technology, the arts have given meaning and nourishment to a beleaguered human consciousness...

Workers were being sundered from the product of their work, people were losing contact with their roots in nature and the cosmos, life was being seen as a

meaningless evolutionary accident, and there was a complete perversion of economics. Whereas in former states of society, the economy existed to sustain the social organism, society now existed to serve the abstract purpose of economy...

Cosmology has been reduced to advertising and direct connections with nature are withering away...

The collapse of cosmology, of transcendent belief, has been corroborated by reductionist science that has failed to give us back a sense of wonder in nature, a reverence for life, a sense of the unity in creation...

—Denys Trussell, "The Arts and Planetary Survival" in *The Ecologist* 19:5 (September/October 1989).

Disparate polarities in communicating and exchanging philosophical thinking and spiritual beliefs have distanced man's indigenous peoples from "mainstream" society and, from our maternal relationship with the land.

Distanced through time, intolerance or assimilation, our once primary mode of communicating with the land and the ancestors seems to have largely been supplanted by "technological" communications systems whose audience is technology itself.

**WARRIORS.** Sharing a relationship with the past, being of this time and technologically challenged, I have gutted the "high" techno beast to the bones. Its modernist flesh removed. Extracting all its pulsating organs and taking its live wires and metal heart to a technological boneyard, a shell remains.

Tamed, silenced, disempowered, unable to communicate in its original electrical language, disassociated from its relative components, unable to function as its carrier intended, it is dysfunctional.

Given a second skin of rawhide and it speaks a new language. It resonates with a voice that speaks above the hum of electrical interference. The heart of the drum pounds out new dreams, old stories, rhythmic songs and prayers for the land, the ancestors, the people. Its electrical cords are replaced with braids of sweetgrass; the assimilation process is complete. The speaker of the house regains, reclaims power and becomes whole.

**CULTURAL BRIEFS.** As distinct peoples living among an indistinct mainstream society, we are often compelled to step outside of our culture in order to function or communicate with mainstream laws, languages, customs or politics. Whether because of degrees of assimilation, philosophical polarities, we often are compelled to separate or disassociate ourselves from our culture in order to associate with "dominant society."

Ironically, the purpose of our associations is often to become disassociated from the mainstream, to become legally "self determined" and recognized as a distinct society by an indistinct society.

You can take the Indian out of the culture, but you can't take the culture out of the Indian. After centuries of exhaustive intellectual gymnastics aimed largely at measuring up to the colonial rule, we must all recognize that our stick is round. Like life, our culture is a journey. We must take all our cultural baggage with us wherever we go.

## Further Reading

Acland, Joan Reid. "Revised cartographies of Canadian art history. The Mi'kmaq art of Teresa Marshall," in Joan Murray ed, *Resources in Canadian Art History*. Toronto: Irwin Press, in press.

Acland, Joan Reid. "Seams of history: Threading hybridity through difference. The Mi'kmaq art of Teresa Marshall," in Christopher G. Trott, *Appropriation and Re-appropriation: The Return of Native Canadian Voices*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, in press.

Marshall, Teresa. *The Department of Indian Affairs*. Toronto: A Space in collaboration with Confederation Centre Art Gallery, 1995.

Marshall, Teresa. *Steal My Rage: New Native Voices*. Vancouver, British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre, 1995.

## Exhibition History

### Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

*Topographies: Aspects of Recent B.C. Art*. September 29, 1996 - January 5, 1997.

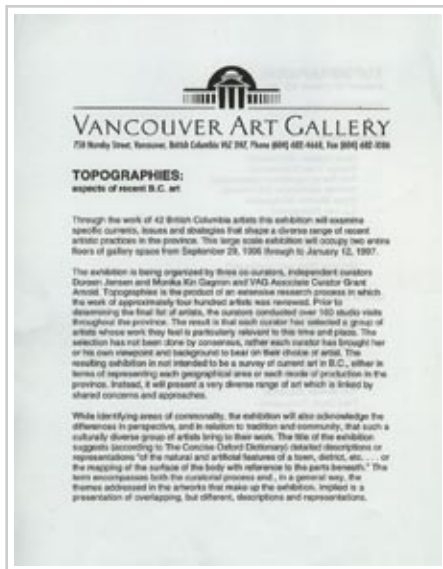
*Recollect*. October 16, 1999 - January 23, 2000.

*This Place: Works from the Collection*. June 29, 2002 - January 2003.

*75 Years of Collecting: First Nations: Myths and Realities*. May 6, 2006 - August 27, 2006.

### Selected Exhibitions outside of the Vancouver Art Gallery

Thunder Bay Art Gallery, *Band Stands*. May 9, 1997 - June 15, 1997.



## Archival History

Press Release  
Miscellaneous History

[transcription]

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY  
750 Hornby Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V6Z 2H7, Phone (604) 682-4668, fax (604) 682-1086

### **TOPOGRAPHIES: aspects of recent B.C. art**

Through the work of 42 British Columbia artists this exhibition will examine specific currents, issues and strategies that shape a diverse range of recent artistic practices in the province. This large scale exhibition will occupy two entire floors of gallery space from September 29, 1996 through to January 12, 1997.

The exhibition is being organized by three co-curators, independent curators Doreen Jensen and Monika Kin Gagnon and VAG Associate Curator Grant Arnold. Topographies is the product of an extensive research process in which the work of approximately four hundred artists was reviewed. Prior to determining the final list of artists, the curators conducted over 160 studio visits throughout the province. The result is that each curator has selected a group of artists whose work they feel is particularly relevant to this time and place. The selection has not been done by consensus, rather each curator has brought her or his own viewpoint and background to bear on their choice of artist. The resulting exhibition is not intended to be a survey of current art in B.C., either in terms of representing each geographical area or each mode of production in the province. Instead, it will present a very diverse range of art which is linked by shared concerns and approaches.

While identifying areas of commonality, the exhibition will also acknowledge the differences in perspective, and in relation to tradition and community, that such a culturally diverse group of artists bring to their work. The title of the exhibition suggests (according to The Concise Oxford Dictionary) detailed descriptions or representations "of the natural and artificial features of a town, district, etc....or the mapping of the surface of the body with reference to the parts beneath." The term encompasses both the curatorial process and, in a general way, the themes addressed in the artworks that make up the exhibition. Implied is a presentation of overlapping, but different, descriptions and representations.

Teresa Marshall  
Cultural Briefs, 1996



**Installation Instructions**  
Miscellaneous History

[transcription]

**INSTALLATION INSTRUCTIONS**

Marshall, Theresa  
Land Escapes, Cultural Briefs, Cultural Brief  
VAG 97.30.1-4 VAG 97.31.1-6 VAG 96.11.1 a-b

This installation is variable, pieces do not have to be exhibited together. The photographs included depict the installation for **Recollect**, Oct. 99. and for the exhibit called **This Place**, 2002/03. The briefcases can be aesthetically arranged according to curatorial decision — including directly on the floor, or as in the 2003 photos, on a low round plinth in a circular arrangement. The corresponding rattle has a plexi stand, but can be, as in the latter photos, exhibited directly on the plinth surface, but not directly on ground.

**Artwork Components:**

VAG 97.30.1-4 4 stretched skin 'paintings'  
VAG 97.31.1-6 6 stretched skin briefcases  
VAG 96.11.a-b 1 briefcase and drumstick

**Installation Components: (optional)**

Plexiglas covers mount for drumstick  
Painted wooden plinth

**Instructions:**

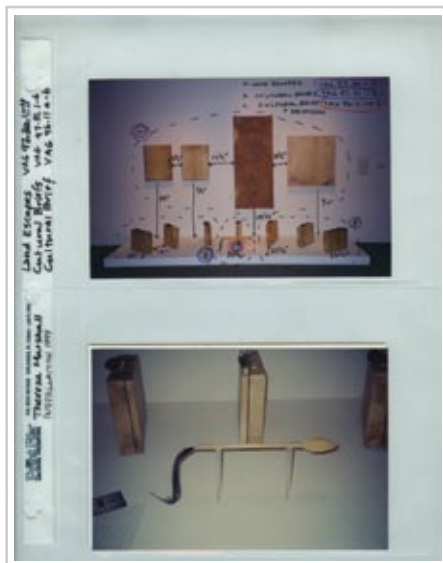
—Hanging works to be installed on wall in variable arrangements -see photographs for examples.

—Install plexi stand on plinth with pins, tie drumstick to support with monofilament, fishing line. Drumstick can also be displayed on the wall next to a skin painting. Can also be laid directly on plinth surface.

—Arrange briefcases. Works are not tied down in any way.

**Note:** Gloves should be worn to handle objects, as oil from hands could discolour skins.

from This Place, 2002 - 03



# Teresa Marshall

## Cultural Briefs, 1996



**Justification**  
Acquisition Record  
1997

[transcription]

**Teresa Marshall**  
**b. Truro, Nova Scotia**

### 1. Land Escapes 1996

rawhide and wood

4 components: 46 x 61 x 10 cm (2); 70 x 84 x 10 cm; 156 x 66 x 10 cm

### 2. Cultural Briefs 1996

rawhide, wood, hardware

6 components: 36 x 43 x 9 cm each

**Vendor:** the artist and William Corbeil Art Brokers

**Provenance:** the artist

**Exhibited:** Vancouver Art Gallery: *topographies: aspects of recent B.C. art, 1996*; Thunder Bay Art Gallery: *Teresa Marshall, 1997*.

Vancouver-based artist Teresa Marshall works primarily with sculpture and installation. Her work has been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery, Optica, Eye Level Gallery, Woodland Cultural Centre, the Power Plant, Open Space, grunt gallery, the National Gallery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Thunder Bay Art Gallery. Her work is in the collections of the Royal Ontario Museum, the Woodland Cultural Centre, the Nova Scotia Museum, the Canadian Native Arts Foundation, and the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Marshall is a self-proclaimed "urban mi'kmaq living in occupied Canada." Through its overtly hybridized character, her work addresses the suppressed histories of First Nations and the process of living between cultures that is representative of current realities for many native people. Marshall's work evokes both a sense of anger at the oppression of native people and, through its punning sense of humor, the potential for healing restitution. A humorously subversive blurring of the boundaries between European-based traditions of high culture and the traditional practices of First Nations is central to her work. These strategies are clearly evident in *Cultural Briefs* and *Land Escapes* — which resemble brief cases and paintings respectively but which have been fabricated from hides so that they can also function as drums.

The VAG's collection currently includes one of Marshall's *Cultural Briefs*. On its own, this is not an adequate representation of her work, which emphasizes installation much more than singular objects. This acquisition would provide the Gallery with broader representation of an artist from this region, whose work occupies an important position within current debates around First Nations art and culture. Her work would have specific connections to works currently in the collection by artists such as Bill Reid, Robert Davidson, Christos Dikeakos, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Marianne Nicolson and Isabel Rorick.

Recommend purchase.

Grant Arnold  
Associate Curator

Teresa Marshall  
*Cultural Briefs, 1996*

## **Terms and Conditions**

The images, texts, documentation, illustrations, designs, icons and all other content are protected by Canadian and international copyright laws. The content may be covered by other restrictions as well, including copyright and other proprietary rights held by third parties. The Vancouver Art Gallery retains all rights, including copyright, in data, images, text and any other information. The Gallery expressly forbids the copying of any protected content, except for purposes of fair dealing, as defined by Canadian copyright law.