

Mekwâc Press Kit

(Immersive/Audiovisual/Digital Art Projects)

1. *Mekwâc* – “Now Is Good”

Purpose: *Mekwâc* (pronounced muh-gwits) brings Cree ways of knowing into a 360° immersive environment through experimental audiovisual systems. Rather than telling a story, the work invites participants to feel time, relation, and presence—positioning Indigenous knowledge as a vital, future-facing force within contemporary digital culture.

Artists: James Monkman (Primary Artist), Renée Monkman, Ph.D. (Writer/Creative Producer), Brian T. Moore (Immersive and Interactive Artist), Nigel Irwin (Musician/Composer), Claudia Skunk (Producer), Brian Vowles (Animator)

Origin: Toronto, Canada

Discipline: Immersive Installation

Format: 360° installation with multichannel sound and real-time systems

Duration: 0:25 mins. Looped

Premiere Status: North American

Year of Production: 2024-2025

Short Description:

Mekwâc (“Now Is Good”) is a 360° immersive, interactive installation that integrates spatialized sound, real-time visuals, and audience-responsive systems. Rooted in Cree teachings, the work invites participants into a cyclical experience of life, perception, and relation—foregrounding presence, interconnectedness, and embodied awareness through advanced immersive media.

2. *Artist Intent & Conceptual Framework*

Mekwâc (“Now Is Good”) is an immersive installation grounded in Cree epistemologies that explores presence, relationality, and cyclical time within a technologically mediated environment. Guided by miyo-pimatisewin—walking in a good way—the work proposes an

alternative to dominant technological futures shaped by extraction, acceleration, and separation. Rather than positioning technology as spectacle or solution, *Mekwâc* treats immersive systems as relational instruments capable of holding memory, attentiveness, and shared experience.

The conceptual framework of the work is rooted in Cree cosmology, where knowledge is lived, cyclical, and emergent through relationship. *Mekwâc* resists linear narrative and representational logic, instead operating through perception, rhythm, and spatial orientation. Spatialized sound, large-scale projection, and subtle audience-responsive behaviors form an evolving audiovisual ecology that participants enter and co-inhabit. Meaning is not delivered but encountered—felt through presence, movement, and collective awareness.

The installation is structured around cyclical stages of learning and life, emphasizing continuity rather than progression. Participants move through environments that encourage slowing down, attunement, and embodied reflection, creating space for an experiential understanding of responsibility to land, water, and one another. Digital processes function as relational agents, responding to presence and reinforcing a feedback loop between participant and environment.

By situating Cree knowledge systems within advanced immersive media, *Mekwâc* challenges Western assumptions embedded in technological futurism, including notions of authorship, progress, and human-system separation. The work asserts Indigenous knowledge not as historical or symbolic, but as living, adaptive, and future-facing. In the context of ecological instability and cultural fragmentation, *Mekwâc* offers a shared immersive environment that foregrounds balance, reciprocity, and care—reminding participants that responsibility begins in the present moment, and that now is good.

3. Relationship to Technology

Technology in *Mekwâc* is approached not as spectacle or solution, but as a responsive system capable of holding presence, memory, and relation. Immersive media functions as a perceptual environment—one that participants enter and co-inhabit rather than observe from a distance.

Spatialized sound, large-scale projection, and subtle audience-responsive behaviors form an evolving audiovisual ecology shaped by collective presence. Digital processes operate as relational agents, responding to movement, proximity, and attentiveness, and reinforcing a feedback loop between participant and system.

Rather than conveying meaning through narrative or instruction, technology is used to create conditions for embodied understanding. Perception, rhythm, and spatial orientation become primary modes of engagement, allowing Indigenous knowledge to be encountered through experience rather than explanation.

By situating Cree epistemologies within advanced immersive frameworks, *Mekwâc* challenges dominant assumptions embedded in Western technological futurism, including ideas of progress, authorship, and separation between human and system. Here, digital tools act as vessels for ceremony and collective attentiveness, transforming architectural space into a contemporary lodge.

Technology in *Mekwâc* supports slowness, relationality, and cyclical time, offering an alternative technological imaginary grounded in balance, responsibility, and care.

4. Creative & Research Process

The creative process behind *Mekwâc* begins in dialogue—dialogue with Elders, with collaborators, and with the land itself. Guided by *miyo-pimatisewin* (walking in a good way), each phase of development is shaped through relational accountability, shared intention, and ongoing community feedback. The work evolves through consultation and listening, ensuring cultural alignment while allowing the installation to remain responsive and adaptive.

Research and experimentation are central to the process. The project develops iteratively through testing and prototyping with projection mapping, spatialized sound, DOF camera-based interactivity, and custom fabrication. These technologies are explored not as fixed tools, but as systems that can respond to presence, movement, and collective behavior. Technical experimentation is approached as a form of inquiry, where perceptual thresholds, rhythm, and spatial orientation are refined over time.

Curatorially, *Mekwâc* is structured around a cyclical model of learning that mirrors Cree knowledge systems. The installation moves through stages of external observation, internal vision, contemplation, and emergence, guiding participants through an experiential process rather than a linear narrative. Digital and architectural materials are transformed into a contemporary lodge—an immersive environment that holds ceremony, reflection, and shared attentiveness.

The work continues to evolve through feedback gathered during presentations, workshops, and community engagement. This iterative process allows *Mekwâc* to remain porous and responsive, adapting to site-specific conditions while maintaining conceptual integrity. By

foregrounding process over product, the project positions immersive technology as a space for relationship-building, embodied knowledge, and collective presence rather than spectacle or consumption.

5. Cultural, Social, or Ecological Context

Mekwâc is situated within Cree cosmology and Indigenous knowledge systems that understand land, water, animals, and human life as interdependent and relational. Created by a Cree artist from Treaty 5 territory now based in Toronto, the work emerges from lived Indigenous knowledge carried across land-based and urban contexts, where connections to place are often fragmented or obscured by infrastructure and acceleration. The installation responds to this condition by reactivating relationship through perception and presence rather than explanation.

Socially, *Mekwâc* addresses the conditions of contemporary life shaped by speed, extraction, and technological mediation. In contrast to dominant models of progress that prioritize efficiency and consumption, the work foregrounds slowness, attentiveness, and collective awareness. By creating an immersive environment that invites participants to pause and recalibrate, *Mekwâc* offers an alternative mode of engagement rooted in care, reciprocity, and responsibility.

Ecologically, the project is informed by Indigenous understandings of land and water as living relatives rather than resources. These perspectives challenge extractive logics embedded in both economic and technological systems, proposing relational accountability as a foundation for sustainable futures. Through immersive media, *Mekwâc* reconnects participants to cycles of life, memory, and time that extend beyond human-centered narratives.

By situating Cree epistemologies within advanced immersive frameworks, *Mekwâc* challenges Western technological futurism and its assumptions of separation between human, system, and environment. The work presents Indigenous knowledge as adaptive, living, and intrinsically compatible with experimental digital practice. In doing so, *Mekwâc* contributes to broader conversations in contemporary art and media about how technology might support balance, reciprocity, and ecological care in an era of social fragmentation and environmental crisis.

6. Accessibility & Audience Experience

Mekwâc is a wheelchair-accessible, immersive installation with level entry and clear circulation throughout the space. The experience may be encountered seated or standing and includes interactive elements responsive to audience presence.

The installation operates on a continuous 25-minute loop, allowing participants to enter and exit freely.

For cultural and experiential reasons, visitors are encouraged to remove their shoes before entering “The Lodge.” The work contains immersive visuals and spatialized sound; individuals sensitive to vertigo or arachnophobia are advised to prepare accordingly or may choose to opt out.

The installation contains no spoken language; the only vocal element is a Cree song integrated into a scene in the soundscape.

7. Curatorial Summary

Mekwâc focuses on experimental audiovisual practices that redefine perception and embodiment through technology. Combining spatialized sound, large-scale projection, and subtle audience-responsive systems, the work transforms Indigenous cosmology into a contemporary immersive environment. Rather than presenting narrative content, *Mekwâc* operates as a perceptual ecosystem—inviting participants to slow down, attune to cyclical time, and experience relationality through presence. By situating Cree knowledge systems within advanced immersive media, the project challenges dominant futurist paradigms and presents Indigenous epistemologies as adaptive, living, and inherently compatible with experimental digital forms.

8. Research Statement

Mekwâc is a research-driven immersive installation that investigates how Indigenous knowledge systems can be activated through contemporary audiovisual technologies without being reduced to representation or narrative. The project asks how immersive media—spatialized sound, large-scale projection, and responsive systems—might function as relational environments capable of holding presence, memory, and cyclical time.

The research framework is grounded in Cree epistemologies, particularly principles of relationality, balance, and responsibility. Rather than translating these teachings into explanatory content, *Mekwâc* explores how they can be encountered experientially through

perception, rhythm, and spatial orientation. The installation operates as a perceptual ecosystem in which meaning emerges through embodied engagement rather than instruction.

Technically, the research unfolds through iterative experimentation with projection mapping, multichannel sound, and audience-responsive systems, including DOF cameras. These tools are tested not as fixed instruments, but as adaptive processes that respond to collective presence. Prototyping, failure, and refinement are central to the research, allowing the work to evolve through feedback from collaborators, Elders, and participants.

Conceptually, *Mekwâc* examines how dominant technological futures privilege speed, extraction, and human-system separation. The project proposes an alternative framework in which technology supports slowness, attentiveness, and reciprocity. By situating Cree knowledge systems within experimental immersive media, *Mekwâc* contributes to broader research conversations in digital art and sound practice about perception, embodiment, and the ethical use of technology. The research positions Indigenous knowledge as living, adaptive, and essential to imagining more sustainable cultural and technological futures.

9. Technical Overview (Condensed)

Format: Cylindrical immersive installation

Footprint: Approx. 30 ft × 30 ft

Ceiling Height: 14 ft recommended (11ft minimum clearance)

Environment: Light-controlled space with level floor

Accessibility: Wheelchair accessible, unobstructed circulation

Storage: Lockable storage required

Compliance: Fire and electrical code compliant

Power:

- Dedicated 30A / 120V service (or two 15A circuits)
- Separate, surge-protected circuits for projection, audio, and sensors

Installation Schedule:

- *Setup:* 2 days

- *Teardown:* 1 day
- On-site technician required during public hours
- Internet access preferred (not mandatory)

Structure:

- *Interior diameter:* 23.5 ft
- *Exterior diameter:* 24.5 ft
- *Construction:* ½" plywood panels with Tentest sound deadening

Projection:

- 12 projectors (6 wall-mounted, 6 floor-mounted)
- *Total resolution:* 9760 × 4860 px (360° cylindrical)
- Media server with 12 outputs, edge blending, warping, and sync

Audio:

- 8 full-range speakers in circular array
- 1 subwoofer
- Multichannel DSP spatial audio

Interaction:

- 3 × Orbbec Femto Bolt depth/DOF Cameras
- Real-time audience-responsive visuals and sound

Note: full technical rider is available upon request

10. Artists' Biographies

James Monkman (Primary Artist): James Monkman is an award-winning Cree visual artist and director from treaty five territory who resides in Toronto, Ontario. James' work spans multiple mediums and requires a unique ability to interplay between artistic vision and technical understanding.

Renée Monkman, Ph.D. (Writer/Creative Producer): Renée Monkman is a BIPOC Creative Writer and Producer with a PhD in Historical Theology and Cree Cosmology. Renée's

thoughtful and community centered approach aims to lift up marginalized voices and perspectives.

Brian T. Moore (Immersive and Interactive Artist): Brian T. Moore is an artist that creates large scale, dynamic immersive experiences. His practice involves a deep commitment to the process that creates respectful and challenging outcomes.

Nigel Irwin (Composer/Musician): Nigel Irwin is a Cree-Canadian musician, composer, and storyteller from Niagara Treaty Territory, who lives in Toronto. Nigel is also the Creative Director at Nagamo, the first production-music library created by Indigenous Artists.

Claudia Skunk (Producer): Claudia Skunk is an Anishinaabe Producer from Mishkeegogamang First Nation, currently based in Toronto. Claudia's deep commitment to telling Indigenous stories spans film, TV, and immersive mediums.

Brian Vowles (Lead Animator): Brian Vowles is an acclaimed character animator whose work has been in many major motion pictures and TV shows. Brian's playful yet meticulous approach elevates every project he is a part of.

11. Project Credits

Artist / Director: James Monkman

Interactive / Immersive Artist: Brian T. Moore

Writer / Producer: Renée Monkman, Ph.D.

Sound / Music: Nigel Irwin

Producer: Claudia Skunk

Animation: Brian Vowles

Technical collaborators: Greg Hermanovic, Rob Sandolowich

Cultural advisors / Elders: Mark Macdonald, Andrew Wesley, Norm Wesley, Ray Aldred, Ruth Kitchekesik, Elizabeth Beardy, Don Monkman

12. Previous Presentations, Exhibition History & Recognition

- *Festivals:* June 2025 ImagineNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival

- *Gallery Showing:* Collision Gallery in Toronto: *Mekwâc* – “Now is Good”; dates of exhibit: July 8-August 22, 2025
- *Residencies:* 1) Artist Residency at Collision Studio (February 2025-May 2025; October-November 2025)
2) Artist Residency at Collision Gallery (June-September 2025)
3) Artist Residency at Collision Studio (December 2025- January 2027)
- *Awards / grants:* 1) Indigenous Screen Office: Immersive and Interactive Program
2) Canada Media Fund: Immersive and Interactive Program
3) Toronto Arts Council: Indigenous Arts Program
4) Ontario Arts Council: Indigenous Arts Program
5) Indigenous Screen Office: Finishing Fund Program
6) Canada Council for the Arts: Short Term Projects

13. Contact & Links

Artist / Producer: James Monkman/Renée Monkman, Ph.D.

E-mail addresses: james@jamesmonkman.com/renee@jamesmonkman.com

Website: jamesmonkman.com; quantumwampum.art; mekwac.art

Instagram account: instagram.com/jamesmonkmanstudio

14. Image and Video Links

Here is the link to the folder with high-resolution images:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/56dnfkutq3oesiio0j57r/AGdvH75Ch-u0CWkjBnASww?rlkey=in3c21qz922rqaf8e8ioe4fg0&dl=0>

Here is the link to the folder with important video content:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/8u60k9j21xl7ojpfb5xm8/AFihkwTuK2pFXvDCVrKINUc?rlkey=elrijpc7a4e53t2sru0jmly0e&dl=0>

- Examples of interactivity
- The mini-documentary of *Mekwâc*

- The trailer of *Mekwâc*
- A rough cut of the piece

Here is the link to the fine cut (not fully finished; filmed with a 360° camera a viewed best on the YouTube App): <https://youtu.be/80ujQobgpK8>