



Ampacity

copper, circuit-board, resistors, capacitors, light-emitting diode, beads, birchbark, porcupine quill, wood and metal
 11 1/2 x 8 in, 29.2 x 20.3 cm

Gaak (Porcupine)

embossed paper, ink, birch bark, capacitors, copper, brass, vintage glass trade beads, raffia, porcupine quill and wood
 on verso signed, titled and dated 2020
 16 1/8 x 8 3/4 in, 41 x 22.2 cm

Ampacity is an electrical term that applies to the measurement of current and the maximum load a conductor, like a wire, can carry. When the conductor is burdened with a load beyond its capacity the system may malfunction or shutdown. Barry Ace uses these electrical terms and objects as metaphors to think through the mechanism of colonization and the physical as well as spiritual burdens placed on Indigenous communities post-contact. In the work *Ampacity* Ace has created an assemblage of objects and components that appear to be disparate: a quill, wire, a circuit board, the figure of a thunderbird cut out of metal. The conductive copper wire feeds into the top of the circuit board; extending from the bottom edge Ace uses electrical components to simulate traditional Anishinaabe floral beadwork. Copper is a sacred element in Anishinaabe cosmology; the floral and fauna depicted in traditional beadwork represents plants with healing properties. The birch bark upon which the composition rests references *wiigwaasabakoon*, the birch bark scrolls used by the

Anishinaabe for recording-keeping. As with *Synthesis* (2018), Ace considers the way culture is transmitted. As the interlocutor between the copper wire and floral motif, the circuit board, like the birch bark, has the capacity to relay instructions for cultural continuance yet if the load travelling via the wire conductor is in excess it can “render a functioning circuit board inoperative but this does not mean it is beyond repair.” As with culture, there is capacity to restore.

In *Gaak (Porcupine)* the minimalist composition includes an embossed porcupine purchased in Paris during Ace’s trip for Robert Houle’s *Paris/Ojibwa* at the Canadian Cultural Centre and Ace’s accompanying site specific performance, *A Reparative Act*. The metal piece framing the porcupine is an electrical measurement gauge that reacts to fluctuations in ambient temperature, a metaphor for cultural flux. Below, Ace has stitched a porcupine quill to signify a “sharp and poignant point” regarding the abrupt disruption caused by contact. Beyond the quill hangs a strand of trade beads, goods used in the service of colonial seduction. Each work’s composition is a visual haiku of objects, that when read together, are a critique of the impact of colonization. As Ace states, a “mnemonic device through which multilayers of meaning are expressed.”

Excerpt - Encoding Culture 2 Catalogue.