



Waawaashkesh Dodem (Deer Clan) Automata Bandolier

Glass beads, capacitors, light-emitting diodes, resistors, vintage circuit boards on handmade paper
on verso signed, titled and dated 2020
37 3/4 x 12 1/4 in, 96 x 31 cm

As with Ace's *Transformation Bandolier*, paper is used for the form of the 'deconstructed' bandolier bag in this 2020 work, *Waawaashkesh Dodem (Deer Clan) Automata*. A profound piece, this may be one of Ace's deepest dive into considering Anishinaabe cosmology and the shape it takes in the contemporary. Here again he uses electronic resistors, capacitors, and diodes to convey a 21st century reworking of the Woodland style floral motifs popular on the *gashkibidaagan* (bandolier bag) from the mid 1800s onward. The component becomes a substitute for the bead, a word that when translated from the Anishinaabemowin, *manidoominens*, means spirit energy berry holding within the capacity for healing energy. For Ace, they "share an uncanny simile with electronic components that also store and release energy to perform their function."

The components, with their intrinsic power, lie latent until they are connected on a circuit board. A schema design maps out the pathways between. A conductive material, like copper, transmits the energy along the path from one to another. Once connected, the components perform as an *automaton* (singular) - a device set into motion by a defined set of protocols that allow it to function with its correct intent. Any obstruction or break in the connectivity halts the course of energy resulting in a system malfunction.

A simple example of *automaton* would be an antique mechanical toy that performed a dance when a crank was turned; more complex examples, digital data processors like a vending or bank machine. Ace draws a connection between the objective of an *automaton* to that of mythology. Following a “predetermined set of instructions” results in the correct programmed output. With regards to myth and legend, the objective is to provide a set of prescribed rules that guide a culture on the correct course to achieve a desired outcome. These directives for human conduct also pertain to established protocols when dealing with mythological and spiritual entities. An example is the *mishibizhiw*, the underwater panther whose domain, in Anishinaabe mythology, is below the surface of the water where it ‘programs’ the movement of currents and waves. “By not following the coded protocols of respect of the water, as recounted in the stories, a predetermined adverse response will be triggered by the *mishibizhiw*.” [See note below] The cultural stories also provide instructions on how to course correct when a system, spiritual or biological, is severed and dysfunction occurs.

The *Automata* paperwork series illustrates the interrelatedness between mythology and the concept of the *automaton* by revealing “abstracted animal forms” in the “schematics printed on vintage circuit-boards.” Here, inside the white square of the board on the pocket panel, Ace perceives the form of a deer (*waawaaskesh*) in the outline of the copper tracking, one of the 7 main clans (*dodem*) of the Anishinaabeg. The copper, an element that holds sacred power for the Anishinaabeg, transforms the abstracted form into a conduit for energy, providing the power to animate it to perform its prescribed function. Ace creates work for his community, first and foremost, embedding signifiers that without explanation may not be discernible to those outside it. For Ace, “the hardware that drives the electronic age, as in complex circuit-board schematics, are laden with abstracted pictographic imagery that present a unique opportunity to rework these ephemera sourced images into culturally specific code.”

Ace articulates his combination of myth and electronics through the creation of a new *portemanteau* - the *mythotronic*. Continuing the motif of historical and contemporary convergence, Ace’s (re)presentations of Anishinaabe cosmology “demonstrate evidence of the presence of *automata-like Anishinaabe* symbology encoded into our digital age.”