Indigenous Women's Animation as Multimedia Art (with Channette Romero)

[opening music]

Dr. Juan Llamas-Rodriguez (JLR): Welcome to the Global Media Cultures podcast. I am your host, Juan Llamas-Rodriguez. Today, we are discussing animation aesthetics and Indigenous new media. Our guest is Dr. Channette Romero. She's an associate professor of English and Native American studies at the University of Georgia. She has published essays on literature and film in journals such as *American Indian Quarterly*, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, *African American Review*, among others.

She's currently completing a book that explores North American Indigenous filmmakers' growing appropriation of popular Hollywood genres, especially science fiction, horror, animation, westerns and sports movies. Channette, welcome to the Global Media Cultures podcast.

Dr. Channette Romero (CR): Thank you so much for having me. I'm delighted to be here.

JLR: I want to start by asking you about your research interests. Why do these topics interest you and why are they an important area for us to study?

CR: I work on Indigenous North American film, and Indigenous film right now is going through a resurgence. There's been a lot of focus since the late '90s on documentaries and on feature-length dramas that are set on reservations. While those are really important areas of study and critical interest and media interest, they give a false impression that that's what all of Indigenous North American cinema looks like.

Instead, I'm really fascinated by this proliferation of genre films, especially Native appropriations of genre films that are really full of negative stereotypes about Natives, like horror films with the Indian burial grounds or animation with images like Pocahontas or the dopey Red Indian. I'm fascinated by Native appropriations of genre films. That's what got me interested in it, that I don't see a lot focused on this wider area.

JLR: Right. Right. The article we're discussing today is very much in line with this. It's thinking about Indigenous appropriations of animation. Today we're discussing your article, “Toward an

Indigenous Feminine Animation Aesthetic," which was published in *Studies in American Indian Literatures* in 2017. Could you give us a brief history of this particular essay? Like when you began working on it, how did the project originate and how do the ideas change in the process of research and of writing?

CR: Absolutely. This project began when I was writing my animation chapter for my book in progress on Indigenous North American genre films. When I started working on the animation chapter, I noticed that there were a lot of differences, stylistic and formal differences, between animations created by North American Indigenous male animators and Indigenous female animators.

I became really interested in why that difference exists, where it comes from, and particularly why Indigenous women animators choose to reject mainstream Hollywood's smooth, sleek animations for jerky, discontinuous, awkward experimental animations that characterizes a lot of Indigenous North American women's animation.

JLR: Right. I mean, central to this argument is thinking about the technical and the aesthetic affordances of animation. You started to mention this in relation to Pocahontas, but could you talk a little bit more about how animation has historically been used to perpetuate these stereotypes and to naturalize imperialism in some ways?

CR: Yes. Absolutely. One of the things that differentiates Indigenous women's animation is that it rejects that mainstream dominant animation style that's characterized by Walt Disney Studios or Warner Brothers. Those studios that are incredibly influential in the medium here in the United States, their style is very sleek.

It almost makes it seem as if they are just neutrally representing reality, when in fact they're portraying a certain version of settler reality where Native women are portrayed as objects who exist solely for the romantic or political interests of settler culture. A lot of Native women's animation wants to reject that and to say, "Hey, these cartoons are portraying colonialism as if it's a romantic fantasy or adventure, or as if it's inevitable."

Instead, they want to ... And that Native women and Native homelands are portrayed as a backdrop in that kind of colonial story. Indigenous women's animation is decolonial. It rejects that colonial gaze by trying to show, hey, what are the other things outside of that frame? What are the other kinds of stories that exist where Native women have their own agency, where they are subjects that watch settler culture and make active decisions about settler culture instead of just tools or objects to be used by them?

JLR: Right. Right. It's interesting, once we started peeling off those, let's say ideologies of the sleek animation, right? Because for so long, there was this distinction between the realism of live action film versus the fantastical world of animation. We kept thinking that the conservatism of realism is more tied to live action representations.

But as you point out, there's a lot that the sleek animation can do to naturalize colonialism, to naturalize all of these projects by wrapping it into a romanticized idea.

CR: Yes. Even just portraying land in the Americas as wide open and empty for Bugs Bunny to run through or the Road Runner to run through, even that, by not portraying Indigenous people who have existed for millennia on that land, that's contributing to imperialism. Animation is so powerful because so many people watch it when they're young here in the United States, it is geared towards children's programming, and so they are adopting a particular ideological point of view when they're young and they're holding onto that.

Often viewers are often holding onto that unconsciously, not really realizing that these cartoons they watched as kids, were actually trying to prompt them to adopt certain worldviews.

JLR: Right. Right. From the one hand, this is a medium that is very helpful for ... or has been mobilized for these kinds of imperialistic naturalization projects. Why have you found that it is also an apt medium or a very fruitful medium for women artists, Indigenous artists, to decolonialize or push back on these ideals?

CR: Native women historically, one of their roles was to create arts and crafts to help people negotiate their relationships to each other, and to negotiate their relationships with the natural world and the cosmos. They're used to be creating arts that are multimedia, that draw upon oral storytelling traditions, simultaneous with visual design elements from Indigenous cultures.

They already historically have been using ... or are multimedia craft workers, and so animation with its ability to draw upon visuals and storytelling components, oral and oral storytelling components, it's a natural medium, or it comes an ideal medium to adopt some of the traditions that Indigenous women have historically been using in the Americas.

JLR: Right. Right. I think there's a great moment where you quote Cherokee scholar, Angela Haas, saying that the first known skilled multimedia workers and intellectuals in the Americas were Indigenous peoples. The notion that we have about what multimedia is, is again, very Western settler focused, which is digital media, turn of the 21st century.

As you pointed out, there is this longer tradition of especially Indigenous women learning to bring together different types of media to create these representations or these projects, so the animations fall in that lineage as well, right?

CR: Absolutely. It draws upon a network of communications in the way that hypertext and multimedia by settler cultures has been using prior to this. They might not have used wires, but they used other forms of technology.

JLR: Thinking about the affordances of animation as it is being used now, I think one of the things you point out in the different artists that you're looking at is they rely a lot on two-dimensional animation, which is notable, especially in the current moment where 3D, CGI animation has become so popular and so prevalent.

What do you see are some of the aesthetic decisions and some of the critiques that Indigenous women are able to do, or why do they turn to two-dimensional animation in their work?

CR: I think it's fascinating. Indigenous women's animation can often draw upon multiple forms of animation. You'll often see a three-dimensional CGI animation along analog, along two-dimensional images. They're drawing upon a lot of traditions, and doing it very explicitly and openly to call attention to their constructedness. One of the things, there is a preference for two-dimensional animation in a lot of Indigenous North American women's animation.

One of the things that it does is literally and metaphorically deflate cinema stereotypes about Indigenous people. They'll show a cinema stereotype and then flatten and deflate it so that it exposes it as a cardboard cutout fantasy of settler culture versus a three-dimensional reality. They do a lot of self-conscious playing with different animation styles and with different materials to call attention to the constructed quality of all animation, including their own, to try to prompt viewers, to recognize that animation is not a neutral medium. That it's constructed by individual people and reflects individual or very specific ideological viewpoints.

They formally and stylistically call attention to that constructive quality and really expose some of the assumptions viewers might have about animation as just being lighthearted, as just being innocuous, as being a neutral fun medium.

JLR: Right. Right. Yeah. For sure. I think you mentioned this too in the article that historically animation has always been a self-reflexive medium. We can go back to *Duck Amuck* and bringing in the actual cartoon animator into the cartoon itself. These, they're not necessarily

always used for critique. It might just be a sort of aesthetic decision to draw attention to the creation of the medium.

How do the different artists that you're looking at mobilize self-reflexivity for particular political didactic aims?

CR: Yeah. That's a great question. One of the things they do is elicit a particular response in their viewers. They presented a particular issue and it draws our assumptions, "Oh, no, this Indigenous woman is in danger of being a victim." That they then immediately undercut. They get us to laugh at the assumptions that many of us bring about what cartoons do, how Indigenous women are portrayed in cartoons and get us to laugh at some of the ridiculous assumptions that we have that we might not even be aware of.

One of the other strategies they use is that they often show Natives consuming other media, especially mainstream media, panoramas, westerns, other kinds of cartoons. They expose the stereotypes within that media. We watch a Native person watch stereotypes about Native people and that juxtaposition that's so different than those mainstream cinematic stereotypes becomes exposed.

Maybe perhaps a third strategy I'll mention is that it's a very old common strategy in animation. In the very first animated film, Émile Cohl's 1908 *Fantasmagorie*, he depicts a hand drawing a figure that then becomes able to move on its own seemingly by magic. It's a male hand. In Indigenous women's animation, they replaced that male drawing hand with a female hand, who is often sewing or doing beadwork, who is using Indigenous domestic arts and crafts.

By replacing that, they showed a different gendered lens. They show Indigenous women being very, very aware of the tradition that they're entering. The argument that they implicitly seems to be making is, "Hey, we've been creating arts for a long time, too, that tells stories about our world, multimedia stories about our world." It's both fun and cheeky, but also very self-conscious and political.

JLR: Right. Right. It goes back to your early point too, about Indigenous artists and Indigenous women in particular, always having been multimedia artists even before we were able to talk about it in those terms as well. Then the inclusion of the female hand in the animation as a very literal “this is a female artist who is doing this work,” pointing to that.
I think one of the strategies that I find really fascinating, and you just mentioned, is the having Indigenous characters within the shorts watch the negative representations of themselves. It's both the self-reflexivity in the narrative, but also self-reflexivity for the audience too of think

about what it is that you're watching and how that influences or impacts how you think about the characters as well.

CR: Also how you've been thinking about Native people. Do you imagine Native people as objects that you watch through an ethnographic documentary or Bugs Bunny dressing up as a Native person? How are we imagining and how are we figuring Native people? Then when you see Native people watching those stereotypes of themselves, you're forced to ... Instead of thinking about Native peoples as objects, they become subjects who are capable of viewing as well.

They're capable of viewing you and creating narratives and imaginations about you, the viewer. That unsettles a lot of the media stereotypes that people might have about Natives.

JLR: Right. Right. And unsettles a lot of the classical way of thinking about visuality, which is we, the audience, are the subjects and the people that we are watching will always be objects. In this case, it's in some ways pushing at that dichotomy or that very strict division too.

CR: Absolutely, and getting us to laugh at ourselves, right? What assumptions did we have and how long have we held them? If we've held them since we saw *Pocahontas* or *Peter Pan* when we were little, perhaps it's time to revisit some of those assumptions.

JLR: Right. Right. In particular, when you're talking about *I Am But a Little Woman*, you mentioned that in your reading of it, you think it is privileging place and land over time. Could you talk to us a little bit more about how it's doing that and why it's significant? In particular, I would say that I was particularly struck by that because I mean, film is a chronological medium, right?

We watch in order. I'm interested in how you see the short privileging place and land over time, even through a medium that is in some ways restricted to be chronologically experienced.

CR: It's fascinating how much music and editing can make a film or piece of multimedia art seem either faster or slower than it is in chronological time. If you have slow protracted images, like you have in *I Am But a Little Woman*, where all we see is land and we just continue to watch it, and the only soundtrack we have are animal noises or noises of a river, it forces the viewer to focus on the land, not as backdrop, but as something that might be important.

Important enough that a fourth of the film is spent looking at this repeated image. Because many of these animations are experimental and they can be really difficult to understand, they

require the audience to spend a lot of time thinking about them. Even after the film finishes, you find yourself as if you are trying to understand or make sense of that experimental film that you've just finished watching.

For example, in the case of Amanda Strong's animations, I'm thinking about *Biidaaban: When The Dawn Comes*, which is a stop-motion puppet animation. She reveals that there are spirits in the land since time immemorial and readers have to ... or viewers rather have to understand how the ghosts of wolves or caribou are watching us in the contemporary moment and that they can interact with us.

She also has a shapeshifter who uses a rock-like device to text, and so viewers have to put in all of this time and effort to understand these images and understand this narrative. That makes these films seem longer than they actually are, and to last longer. Even after you finish watching it, you've hit pause or shut down the device you're viewing it on, you find yourself thinking about the images and the narrative that you've watched.

They protract time in certain ways and force you to think about the land in ways that you might not. If you were watching a mainstream animation, land is often the backdrop. It's not a character in the story. It can't come to life and suddenly start texting.

JLR: Right. Right. Because so much of, especially mainstream low-budget animation, is about the static background and action is the thing that is driving the narrative. The ability to recycle backgrounds depends on the fact that we're not going to focus on them. We're focusing on a character moving, and that's literally the only animation in the film that we're interested in.

A lot of what these shorts are doing is doing the exact opposite, is the anima of animation is bringing to life the setting rather than moving action as the driving force, right?

CR: Or revealing that the setting was always alive to begin with even if settler culture doesn't acknowledge that it's alive. I mean, I think one of the things that's fascinating about mainstream film grammar is that so much of what makes sense in a film comes through continuity editing, and a lot of that comes from D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*.

This first major feature film where we have things like cross-cutting, where we have reaction shot kind of movements and that that's so heavily tied in that film with the imperial gaze. In that film in particular, it's about the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. It would be wrong to imagine that all of standard film grammar, classic Hollywood film grammar, that a lot of animation uses.

It would be wrong to think that those are neutral, that all of that continuity editing, all of those approaches to how we look that there is not imperialism encoded within it. Indigenous women's animation tries to give different shots and different sounds and to make us aware that we're expecting particular kinds of cuts, establishing shots where land is simply the backdrop, where instead of an image of land, that we expect to be simply an establishing background shot, that is the film.

I think it's awesome to confront viewers with the assumptions we have that are encoded within the very form and style that we've become so comfortable with.

JLR: Right. Right. Yeah. It's great that you mention *Birth of a Nation*, because it got me thinking about Nicholas Sammond's work, *Birth of an Industry*, where he's also trying make the argument of so much early animation and the way characters were portrayed was borrowing the practices of minstrelsy. In that sense, a lot of the practices that we still have about how characters are flexible or move in mainstream animation, come from that genealogy of the pliable black body in that sense too.

CR: Absolutely.

JLR: Even if we're not necessarily tying the one-to-one to like this was the shot/reverse shot or the continuity editing that Griffith used and now we're still using today, as the examples that you point out, it makes it so much more explicit that there is no apolitical aesthetic decision. There are implicit ideologies in treating the land as simply an establishing shot.

That it just lets us know where we are and we can move on because that's not what matters, but rather this Indigenous artist is pushing and saying it actually matters where you are and it matters that you know the place, the history of it and all of those things rather than just discarding them.

CR: Absolutely. There are real-world consequences to imagining Indigenous homelands as simply backdrop for settler stories or to imagining Indigenous women as simply tools or objects to be gazed upon or used as settler culture would see fit. One of the things that I think is really important to remember is that Native women are two and a half times more likely to be raped and sexually assaulted than women from other communities, and that Native women are 10 times more likely to be murdered.

There are real-world consequences in how we portray Native women, because it affects how people imagine them and their role in our culture. If they're simply objects, they can be used

and discarded. Often when it comes to animation, we think that these are lighthearted, neutral, innocuous images, but they actually have real world consequences.

I'm thinking particularly about interviews of the serial killers caught on the U.S.-Canadian border, they said ... Who have targeted ... One in particular, Robert Pickton, he killed 49 Aboriginal women. When asked about it, he said, "Well, these are just squaws. They're meant to be used." There are a real-world consequences to these cinema stereotypes about Indigenous women.

JLR: Right. Right. Yeah. For sure. Following on the technical or aesthetic decisions too, so we can think about the portrayal of the land and the visual aspects of that, and the question of chronology or continuity editing as well. You also point out to the use of sound as being very particularly interesting in how Indigenous artists mobilize, not only language, but instruments and sound effects in creative ways. Could you talk a little bit more about that and what you see as the interesting creative aspects of that?

CR: Absolutely. For oral cultures, sound is incredibly important as you can imagine. That links up with the history of sound recording in the United States. It emerged simultaneously with imperialism in the 19th century. U.S. government and the U.S. military were going to war against Indian nations in the 19th century. They justified their rhetoric based on ideas about progress that imagined that Native peoples were just magically vanishing and dying off.

Ethnographers and academics rushed to fill phonographs with the sounds of these dying nations and dying cultures. While they might have imagined themselves as a neutral medium, in fact, they helped to perpetuate the imperial idea that these cultures were dying off. From its earliest origin, sound recording was very political. One of the things that Native women's use of sound does is to collapse this false distinction between the private and the political or the domestic and the public or the government and media.

They were enlisting those for their own purposes saying that, "Hey, Native cultures have in fact not died off, that Natives aren't just simply victims whose stories you have to record while they're in the process of just inevitably passing away. That in fact, they are thinking peoples with living cultures who have the agency to also represent themselves through the media in a more accurate way than historically they have been represented in sound media."

JLR: Right. Right. That history of audio recording ties into, as you pointed out, to colonial legacies of capturing the Other. It's the assumption that Indigenous cultures are dying and that

we will save them. We the settlers coming in, we'll save them by capturing their voices and in some ways saving that language and that culture has all sorts of colonial baggage to it as well.

CR: Yeah. It's also tied to this idea that we see in documentary a lot, but that some animations play with as well, the ethnographer who has the right to learn everything, to learn and record everything there is to know about an Indigenous culture. They're going to preserve it better than the Indigenous peoples would preserve their own cultures and they'll decide what's the most important aspect to preserve. Indigenous women's animation explodes that.

Explodes that ethnographic gaze and that ethnographic voice that you see in some of these early sound recordings and early panoramas in the 19th century.

JLR: Exploding the whole idea of preservation as specifically medium-tied. Like preservation through oral cultures is about continuing that story. Using media as a form of transmission or representation or reproduction rather than a storage medium also has different implications there as well.

CR: Well, yeah, the idea of these ethnographic recordings is that it's static. It's not dynamic and you, as a listener are privileged to hear everything that you want to hear, or that the ethnographer decides is important to hear. Whereas Indigenous women's multimedia and their animations are interactive. They require quite a lot from their viewers where you have to really work to understand how the sound that seems really discontinuous from the image or the design that's on the screen, how those two relate.

It's a really radically different approach to sound. There's the passive listening, or there's the active interaction, multimedia interaction, that a lot of Indigenous animation demands of its viewers.

JLR: Right. Right. To your earlier point about time, even though I think all of the ones that you analyze here are shorts, right? Considered shorts in the schema of what we think of a feature film versus a short. But the strategies that they are using to get us to contemplate the land, to think through what the animation is doing expands that time. Even if, in the metric that we have for what time is, it's still only 30 minutes or 25 minutes.

The experience of it is meant to feel longer because you're working through interactively the process of learning what it is that the animation is doing.

CR: Absolutely. The films themselves are non-linear. They're drawing upon really old oral and visual traditions and showing how they can be used and deployed in very contemporary, digital animation.

JLR: And rewards multiple viewings too.

CR: Absolutely.

JLR: Throughout the article, you are talking about Indigenous women animation, but you mentioned at the beginning that these are artists from different Indigenous nations and also different current settler colonial states. Can you talk a little bit about the decision to group them all together or talk about them all in the same article? What is the critical purchase in examining an Indigenous aesthetic by comparing all of these different works from different places?

CR: Absolutely. I focus primarily on, or almost entirely on Indigenous North American cinema. While I do explore some animation in Mexico, and there're some fascinating animation being done by *68 Voices* there, predominantly I focus on the United States and Canada. While those are two different nation states, the U.S. and Canada, their laws historically interplayed off of each other. The U.S. would enact a law and Canada would enact a very similar law the next year and vice versa.

One of the things that links Indigenous women who are from all different tribes is their experiences under nation state settler governments that are quite similar, that position Indigenous tribes in very similar ways. A lot of the animators I talk about would identify first from a particular clan and then from a particular tribe.

They however see the political usefulness of making alliances with other Indigenous tribal people that have experienced similar negative repercussions of these nation states settlers' laws. Also, one of the things that's fascinating is that in contemporary times there are grants, there are prizes, there are film festivals, there are workshops that are geared specifically to Native American, Indigenous, First Nations, Aboriginal creators.

So financially it is very strategic for them to adopt, even if temporarily, a wider Indigenous North American identity. One of these wider labels. Then they meet each other at these workshops and these film festivals, and they're influencing each other's work, so we start to see overlapping aesthetics that are joining Indigenous women's creations, even if the women are from different tribes and there will be differences specific in many of them to that specific woman's tribe.

We start to see some similar patterns emerge in the style and the form, even if some of the designs are tribally-specific. It's a fascinating aesthetic that is emerging that links them for political, financial, strategic purposes.

JLR: Right. Right. Yeah. It's fascinating. Last year I was talking to Karrmen Crey and she mentioned this institutional aspect, which I didn't know about before. It sounds fascinating. The strategic positioning of oneself in relation to the institution that is perhaps tied to the government that historically had negative effects on the Indigenous peoples and now as a sort of form to try and redress that, there are all these grants and movements.
It's about knowing how to speak to those institutions that may not have done the work yet to know the differences between different Indigenous groups. Then using those resources in order to be able to tell those stories about different Indigenous experiences, right?

CR: Absolutely. Then along with those institutions associated with federal nation state grants, in addition to those kinds of institutions, there's institutions like imagineNATIVE, which is the largest international Indigenous film festival. There, there are links like the Embargo Collective one and two, Denise Bolduc, who was the artistic director for many years, she invited Indigenous women to participate in these groups where they pushed each other to innovate creatively and to move Indigenous cinema further artistically, creatively, formally, stylistically.

Some of those aesthetic and creative changes are being prompted, not just from external forces, but also Indigenous women encouraging each other to develop their own thinking and expanding the field. I think that is incredibly exciting.

JLR: I'm fascinated that you mentioned the *68 Voices* project from Mexico, because I'm somewhat familiar with it and I find it really fascinating too. Could you talk a little bit more about what you find interesting in that project?

CR: I think *68 Voices* is powerful for so many different reasons. It's patterned or the idea is that there is an effort to create 68 different animations, each one told in one of the Indigenous languages that continue to exist in Mexico. That I find to be incredibly powerful. Then within those different Indigenous languages and those different tribes that speak those languages, there's an effort to tell the story from that particular tribal point of view.

So it has led to fascinating films, creatively, narratively, stylistically, formally, experimental, and just great, exciting animations that are really pushing the boundaries. I think that what's going on with *68 Voices* is somewhat different than what's happening in the United States and

Canada. I think that has a lot to do with funding is being influenced by a different set of animations and different kinds of creators.

It looks different than the ones being created in the United States and Canada. Though one of the things I've noticed in *68 Voices* there is still often a focus on domestic arts and crafts. There's a lot of people sewing. There's a lot of tapestry. There's a lot of experimental animation and playing around with sound. There are some overlaps, but it doesn't seem quite as coherent as some of the animations I talk about in my article.

JLR: Right. Right. Even though it's the 'same project' in terms of where the funding is coming and how it's being presented, it's going aesthetically in very different directions as well.

To your earlier point, I think one of the things that's fascinating about the project is even though at first glance or on the surface, it seems like the earlier project of preserving the language, like we're going to create a short about this specific Indigenous language as a way of saving it or showing it to people, but in reality, that's just the launching pad for telling a specific Indigenous story and all of these creative aesthetic ways. It's less about the storage version of just sticking the language in one animation and hoping it survives. It's more about the reproduction part of it, of telling this story and moving it forward.

CR: Absolutely. It would be wrong to imagine that all of the Indigenous language use that happens in Indigenous women's animation from the place we would now call the United States or Canada, it would be wrong to imagine that there isn't also a desire to preserve and transmit Indigenous languages as well. That is a component.

JLR: Right. You mentioned earlier that this article was part of the prep work for the chapter in your book. How have you built on it since its publication? How does it fit into the larger book project now? Where is the project now?

CR: That's a great question. I'm still in progress. My manuscript, my book on Indigenous North American genre films is still in progress. One of the things that's been fascinating that I've noticed is that while earlier, when this article first came out in 2017 and it was written in 2015 and 2016, there was a more dramatic difference between animation created by Indigenous men and animation created by Indigenous women.

Since then, I think I've begun to see more Indigenous male animators, creating experimental animation. Playing around with flat design more, playing around with different kinds of textures and fabrics. One of the most fascinating films, or perhaps the most fascinating film I saw last

year in 2020 was by an Inuit animator named Glenn Gear. His brightly colored, non-continuous, experimental animations require the audience to think long and hard.

One of his films ... And I'm going to butcher the pronunciation, *Katinngak*, it has such a catchy soundtrack. It's Inuit throat singing so it draws upon Inuit women's oral tradition, but the song used is so catchy that you find yourself singing it for days after you've finished watching the film. You work so hard to try to understand this experimental film that it's a more protracted viewing, similar to the kinds of things that we see in Inuit women's animation more typically.

I think we're starting to see an increase in experimental films. There's a Haida filmmaker, Christopher Auchter, his *Mountain of SGaana* animation has come out and it starts with smooth, sleek, three-dimensional CGI animation and then suddenly there is a female mouse spirit who starts knitting. When she knits, it tells this traditional Haida story that then the contemporary individual who we watch texting in this sleek three-dimensional CGI in the opening scene, we watch him interacting with this sewn tapestry.

I think we're starting to see more experimental animation coming from Indigenous men. I think that's incredibly exciting. It complicates my book chapter, but in an awesome way. There is something incredibly fun about working on very, very contemporary animation, because it's constantly coming out and you have to rethink your ideas about things.

I think that's great because one of the things that it does is it shows us that Indigenous cultures and Indigenous creators are living, they're dynamic, they're constantly working, they're constantly adapting. They're constantly showing us the ways in which tribal traditions continue to stay relevant for the contemporary moment. I think that that is incredibly exciting.
I've had to shift and not see such a stark contrast, gendered contrast in the animation, but I think that's pretty cool as well.

JLR: You mentioned the new work from these Indigenous male artists, but are there any other recent developments, either in the world or in artistic practice, that have also shifted or added to the ideas that you were talking about in 2015 and 2016?

CR: One of the things that will be interesting is to consider how Indigenous creators make meaning, make sense, negotiate COVID-19. COVID-19 has devastated a lot of communities, especially Indigenous communities in the Americas. Indigenous peoples have always used their arts to negotiate their relationship to the world, to negotiate their histories to what's happening to themselves and their communities.

I imagine that in a few years, we will see some compelling Indigenous cinema that wrestles with the heartbreak and also the strength and resilience that we see in tribal communities' relationship to COVID-19. One of the things that did not surprise me, but seem to surprise mainstream newspapers, was that when it came to tribal communities in Canada and in the United States, they privileged giving the vaccine to people who were fluent in the Indigenous languages.

That was really important to them to make sure to preserve the lives of their Indigenous language speakers. While some reporters were really surprised, and some of my students were really surprised by that, I wasn't. That is an ongoing commitment in tribal communities. It's one that's reflected in a lot of Indigenous cinema and a lot of Indigenous animation. I will not be surprised to see a lot of works really wrestle with COVID-19's impact on their communities.

JLR: Right.

CR: And perhaps I'll just mention that one of the things that characterizes a lot of Indigenous animation by men and women, is that frequently it's distributed for free online. Some of that is the product of their funding sources, if they were funded by the National Film Board of Canada, if they were funded by Sundance or Disney. Part of that distribution has to do with their funding, but part of it is also to increase interest in Indigenous stories and in Indigenous cultures.

It's a very specific and strategic effort to tell their viewers whether they're Indigenous or not, whether they're from their specific tribe or not. To tell them Indigenous stories, to tell them about Indigenous cultures and to show how fun and cool Indigenous cultures are and to draw their interest, not only in these particular stories, but in the people whose stories they reflect. It's an attempt to gain interest and engagement in Native peoples, Native cultures and in the ways that imperialism continues to affect Native lives and Native communities. These are free. They're available online. I strongly encourage everyone to view as many as you can, but also at the same time to be aware that there are drawbacks in releasing your material that you spent two years working on, that there are drawbacks into releasing that for free online, because of the financial repercussions.

It's expensive and time-consuming to create film. It's expensive and time-consuming to create animation. The very fact that they are widely distributed often for free online indicates just how important these creators feel that their work gets widely disseminated.

JLR: Right. Right. For sure. Channette, thank you so much for joining us.

CR: You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

[closing credits music]

JLR: This episode of the Global Media Cultures podcast was produced by me and edited by Alan Yu, and closing credits music by Cloud Mouth. This project is supported in part by the School of Arts, Technology, and Emerging Communication at the University of Texas at Dallas. Global Media Cultures podcast introduces media scholarship about the world, to the world. I'm Juan Llamas-Rodriguez. Thank you for listening.