ANYA LUKIN LINKLATER is Alutiiq and hails from the Native Villages of Port Lions and Afognak of Southern Alaska. Currently based in Northern Ontario, she is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice incorporates elements of choreography, dance, performance, video art, film, and writing. Linklater’s performative work redresses Alaska Native forms of expression within contemporary aesthetics to investigate themes of cultural loss, domesticity, and political resistance. Site-specific performances such as Mapping Resistances (2010) witnessed the artist respond to the Oka Crisis—the pivotal land dispute between Mohawk peoples and the township of Oka in the province of Québec—by embodying the spirit of Alutiiq women and translating their presence through a series of actions, rhythms, and meditations. More recently, Linklater has further centralized the female body to explore the ways Oka in the province of Quebec—by embodying the spirit of Alutiiq women and translating their presence through a series of actions, rhythms, and meditations. More recently, Linklater has further centralized the female body to explore the ways (2010) witnessed the artist respond to the Oka Crisis—the pivotal land dispute between Mohawk peoples and the township of Oka in the province of Québec—by embodying the spirit of Alutiiq women and translating their presence through a series of actions, rhythms, and meditations. More recently, Linklater has further centralized the female body to explore the ways Indigenous knowledge and experience inscribes itself has further centralized the female body to explore the ways of actions, rhythms, and meditations. More recently, Linklater has further centralized the female body to explore the ways of actions, rhythms, and meditations. More recently, Linklater has further centralized the female body to explore the ways of actions, rhythms, and meditations. More recently, Linklater has further centralized the female body to explore the ways of actions, rhythms, and meditations.

I’d like to begin by discussing your educational training and background. You earned an undergraduate degree in the arts from Stanford University, where you were awarded the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship and Louis Sudler Prize in Creative and Performing Arts, a master’s degree in education from the University of Alberta, and are currently pursuing a PhD in cultural studies at Queen’s University. Can you discuss what your dissertation topic engages and how it is reflective of your earlier education, if at all?

As you mentioned, my undergraduate degree is in English, and my research at Stanford University focused on Native American women’s poetry, poetics, and performance. At the University of Alberta, I focused my graduate course work on Indigenous pedagogies, cinema and pedagogy, and Indigenous research methodologies. My master’s research began ten years of research-creation centered on traditional Alaska Native performance by investigating movement forms, language, and song. This research often led me to engage with anthropological and ethnographic texts that document Alaska Natives’ precarious relationship to the field of anthropology and museums, dating to the early 20th century. Museum collections across the world hold our objects, yet our former relationship to many of these cultural objects is no longer fully understood. Anthropology is often turned to as a source of cultural reconstruction but is fraught with a difficult history.

My doctoral work is an investigation of art writing as a practice. I intend to write a series of essays about contemporary Indigenous artists who are engaging with ideas of insistence and perhaps translation in their work. Your visual practice remains interdisciplinary and dynamic, and you continue to employ video, performance, photography, and installation. What is the philosophy driving this body of work?

My early artistic practice insisted on a continuum of performance and translated my concerns, including (but not limited to) resurgence and futurity through contemporary art and performance. Insistence and translation continue to be central to my work, but these concerns are complicated by everyday, lived experience. I am compelled by process and the idea of translation across forms. As a respected poet, your work has been featured in numerous publications both in Canada, the USA, and in other international venues. Can you provide a sense of when you began writing poetry?

I began writing poetry as a young person at Stanford University. At the time, I read poetry but did not study creative writing formally or develop creative writing as a practice. I wrote monologues for a few years, here and there, as I was interested in performance. In Edmonton I joined poets Anna Marie Sewell and Marilyn Dumont informally in a writing group that took place at Anna Marie’s kitchen table. We worked like this for a couple of years until an opportunity arose with the Edmonton Poetry Festival to develop a larger-scale project. The Honour Songs Project consisted of writing and performance workshops we coordinated in the City of Edmonton, as well as performances and installations of text/textiles as art objects. This was a turning point in some ways for me, but it wasn’t until 2012 that text became more prominent in my practice, building on my methodology of text/textiles as art objects. This was a turning point in some ways for me, but it wasn’t until 2012 that text became more prominent in my practice, building on my methodology of text/textiles as art objects.

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I’m curious to know if you can speak to some of the themes undercutting your current work in both your writing and art practice?

Themes include personal memory, historical memory, Indigenous women’s experiences, labor on the land, Indigenous language, poverty, pedagogy (learning), the ideas of home, distance and diaspora, and Indigenous concepts of orality—our ways of passing on knowledge—and relationality, knowing how to be a kind, ethical person in relation to the world, informed by lived experiences. More recently, I’m compelled by the complexity of our lives as Indigenous peoples: the specificity of our experiences, which counter reductive ideas that can come to dominate our imaginations.

Who is your audience, or, better yet, who do you imagine your audience to be during the process of writing? Who do you write for primarily?

It’s a difficult question, but perhaps first and foremost I write for my family. My dad reads a great deal in our village in Alaska, especially during the winter. He encourages me to write, and I wonder if the work partly reflects his generation’s experiences. I write for the women in “The Harvest Sturdises” and “the the,” catalyzing the development of a series of live performances in galleries, videos, and installations for the past three years. If I think about the women I’ve learned from, they are Indigenous women poets with deep connections to their ancestral homes and to the communities that they live in today.

While it’s often an overlooked question, especially for mid-career writers, it’s quite a significant one: why did you begin to write, and write poetry specifically?

Sometimes the poems become clearly visual, referencing beadwork, a hide being stretched, or the smoke used to color hide in a canvas tipi. These visual images are connected to the content of the poems.

I often find establishing the structure of the work, with its own internal logic, difficult. Establishing the structure often goes hand in hand with the content of the work.

Once we were young and looked to others for guidance. Do you have any advice for young writers?

As a writer myself, I often wonder what other writers struggle with. For me, it’s doing justice to the artist or artwork I’m discussing. What do you find most difficult when writing?

Do you have any advice for young writers?

Take the time and space to be a writer. It takes deep dedication to write in a thoughtful way.

Go reading poetry, short stories, the long journalistic article, and novels. Develop a daily writing practice. Don’t beat yourself up if you can’t write every day. Seek mentors or writing groups. Edit rigorously. Reflect. Think about the concepts that you are writing about. Ask yourself what ideas you may be replicating. Don’t publish too soon; develop your work. Take the time and space to be a writer. It takes deep dedication to write in a thoughtful way.

What are your plans for the near future? Do you have any exhibition or writing projects underway, and where should the reader expect to encounter them?

My writing has responded to political events in the world: growing poverty during Reaganomics. In Native American studies classes in the 1990s, I learned about the histories and policies Indigenous peoples have survived in North America. These histories are mostly absent from K–12 education. Indigenous women poets reflected their refusal to be erased or rendered invisible while grappling with the attempted genocide in North America and intergenerational trauma. These poems were connected to writings by women of color, and I recognized a shared experience. In the last few years, my writing has responded to political events in the world: the attempted assassination of Malala Yousafzai, the girls’ education activist, and Chief Theresa Spence of Attawapiskat First Nation’s 44-day hunger strike on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Canada, for treaty rights. My writing has become more specific.

How would you describe your poetry to others that may not have read it or are interested in reading and experiencing it?

In some ways the work is sparse. The poems use everyday language, which is possibly more accessible to the reader. Sometimes the poems directly quote women interviewed. The poems make sense of or interrogate the space between words. I reckon with the white space on the page or the space between language as a place, a possibility or potentiality.

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What are your plans for the near future? Do you have any exhibition or writing projects underway, and where should the reader expect to encounter them?

Currently I’m editing a new video for an exhibition curated by Wendy Red Star at Mary Elizabeth Dee Shaw Gallery, Weber State University in Utah. I’m in the midst of development of a new installation for a two-person exhibition, A Parallel Excavation, curated by Rachel Howze at Art Gallery of Alberta in Edmonton. I’m in research and development of performance for a series, Affinities, Variations, and Scenes, in conjunction with the first retrospective of Joan Jonas in Canada at DHC/ART in Montreal. This project, curated by Barbara Clausen, will include Joan Jonas’s They Come to Us without a Word, which was installed in the American Pavilion at the Venice Biennale this year. I was privileged to see this work and look forward to responding to Jonas’s body of work.

Finally, from the last question from the “Proust Questionnaire”: What is your favorite motto?

Ask an elder.
44 days

At twenty-one days, on the eve of the new year on unmelted river, I watch until night, afraid of what might come. Forty-four days. She relents, stays with us. She is not spent, she continues. Now that number and she know one another.

—Tanya Lukin Linklater

Nokom

Her hands that cradle caribou hide, sinew, all manner of beads, fur – my hands crouch inside the space she presses between her fingers, inside the space resting at her palms.

Do you remember when you asked me to be your grandmother?

I bend at the waist, wrap my arms around her shoulders, resting against the wheelchair.

Yes, my sound to her ear.

—Tanya Lukin Linklater