



Kakanâcisitacâhk: Drumming Our Houses Home

an exhibit by
One House Many Nations

Indigenous peoples have inhabited Turtle Island for millennia, long before Western conception of history. From generation to generation, they've maintained a strong umbilical relationship with the land and waters. It is an innate and foundational relationship inseparable from their identities, stories, spirituality, self-determination and worldviews. The land holds deep social and cultural meaning. It is a life-giver, and it is kin. The land nurtures and sustains every breathing entity that lives in relationship with it. Indigenous peoples have always acknowledged this understanding, as well as the inherent responsibility, respect, and reciprocity that attends life on the land. In this way, to defend the land is to defend a life source and the embodied agency therein. OHMN's efforts over the decade it's been in existence are an intervention oriented toward the repossession of Indigenous land. By extension, it is also an intervention against housing injustices, which remain at emergency levels across several First Nations reserves in a first-world country known to be among the wealthiest. OHMN emerged as a grassroots initiative and an offshoot of Idle No More, another movement that arose out of dire necessity. Affected by the severe housing insecurity they witnessed firsthand on their reserve, OHMN's primary initiators, Dr. Alex Wilson and Sylvia Saysewahum McAdams, moved with urgency to rally support for change. In 2015, they published a crowdfunding campaign online and began the journey toward renovating or building sustainable housing, starting with their communities. Through partnerships and collaborative efforts, they embarked on their mission to tackle the inhumane living conditions, one house in one community at a time.

Aside from the preeminent colonial incursions that led to Indigenous dispossession, eroding the land of its multilayered cultural and spiritual meaning, the land became a legal entity and a fungible tool for settler economic production. The colonial contexts of social control and its present implications, along with ongoing industrial expansion—including pollution of waterways,

phosphate contaminates, creation of hydro dams, and deforestation—continue to adversely restructure the environment, stripping away the knowledge systems that come with the land. This transformation of the land is directly linked to corporate agenda and, as a result, climate change. These forces of power asymmetrically impact Indigenous lives, further detaching them from the land, their home. Central to contending with the housing crisis is creating awareness of the larger forces undergirding it and its influence on healthcare, mental well-being, safety, Indigenous language and cultural continuity. This exhibit hopes to educate and inform new audiences of these systemic factors intrinsic to OHMN's endeavours.

Along with the six completed residences, which have housed six individuals in Big River First Nation, Saskatchewan and Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Manitoba, they are accompanied by smaller housing assistance trailers, which help build capacity and enable living off the land. This mobile trailer unit is named Wachusko Weesti or the Muskrat Hut. Like the main housing projects they've realized, the hut is designed in collaboration and input from the same community members who end up utilizing the facility. The completed housing project, like the hut, receives post-occupancy evaluations a year after the residents have moved in. It is an invaluable measure OHMN uses to continuously learn and improve upon these housing projects.

The hut was designed as a hub equipped with supplies for cultural and land-based activities as well as routine upkeep of the houses. The structure includes a kitchenette, water storage, communication equipment, solar power and a bathroom. Because of its size and portability, the hut can be hauled to remote locations where at least trail access is possible. The name of the hut is after Wachusk or Muskrat, which has spiritual significance in many Cree and other First Nations communities and is known to be part of their ongoing creation and evolution story. The Muskrat is an animal

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PARTNERS:

Idle No More
Making the Shift Inc.
University of Manitoba
University of Saskatchewan

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Jason Surkan
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Luther Konadu
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regarded for its ability to continually work behind the scenes, upholding and protecting the larger ecological system. In this way, the Muskrat Hut serves a critical supporting role for the sustainability of the housing projects and for its residences.

A version of this resource facility named the Universal Utility Core is designed for Northern First Nations communities in tandem with their main living unit as a means to easily access resources for home improvement and upkeep. It affords a degree of independence for residents in these more remote areas with limited access to hardware stores for household repairs and maintenance. Photo documentation for these various projects is included throughout the exhibit.

Among the other artifacts present in the exhibition is a banner installation visualizing the possibility of housing as cosmology. This piece was initially presented at the 2023 Biennale Architettura in Venice, Italy, in collaboration with the collective Architects Against Housing Alienation. Above all, the piece seeks to advocate for a shift in envisioning housing as a colonial

commodity and toward a cosmology. That means accounting for an interconnectedness and community-driven housing solution whereby the production of houses is directly informed by the nuances of the community's cultural values and unique homemaking knowledge. The title of the exhibition reinforces this viewpoint. Drumming our house home, as the title of the exhibit indicates, is a ceremonial practice and a crucial acknowledgment of the many ways the earth and the land sustain and nourish us. By extension, this acknowledgment also creates an intimate awareness of how housing is invariably correlated to the land. Along with architectural models of OMHN's housing projects, cultural artifacts integral to living on the land are culled and presented in the exhibit, referencing the considerable conditions that come together to allow for and Indigenous home and placemaking.

text by

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