MODEST LIVELIHOOD
Brian Jungen and Duane Linklater

Text by Jenny Western
Colourful and sumptuous, *Modest Livelihood* opens with a glorious shot of the land in all its splendour: Green trees, yellow grasses, red brush, and purple mountains form a layered and composed scene. A white butterfly flits past view and the eye can't help but devour the natural opulence of this landscape. Enter three men who travel through bush, marshes, and forested areas with rifles slung over their shoulders. The two younger men wear baseball caps and follow an older man in a cowboy hat. The older man is Dane-zaa elder Jack Askoty, the tall man is Duane Linklater, and the other man is Askoty's nephew Brian Jungen. Although perhaps not immediately evidenced by their roles in the film, Linklater and Jungen are award-winning visual artists with celebrated respective practices. *Modest Livelihood* marks an important collaboration between them: hunting for moose together and making a film about hunting for moose together.

On the surface this is a straightforward document about a hunting trip in a beautiful setting. But there is another message here too, one towards which the film's title gestures. *Modest Livelihood* is derived from wording related to a 1999 Supreme Court ruling on the Marshall decision. A man from the Membertou First Nations, Donald Marshall Jr. was charged with fishing and selling without a licence after he caught and sold about two hundred kilograms of eels. Marshall's position was that he had permission to catch and sell fish due to the treaties signed between his Mi'kmaq ancestors and the British Crown. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Marshall did have the right to hunt, fish, and gather based upon the Peace and Friendship Treaties of 1760 and 1761. However, within the ruling the phrase “moderate livelihood” was used by the Supreme Court to highlight that these treaty rights did not offer unlimited access to natural resources. Hunting and fishing for basic necessity was allowable but this did not include an “open-ended accumulation of wealth” nor the inclusion of logging, mining for minerals or offshore gas deposits. ¹

In Canada there are eleven numbered treaties. Linklater, who is Omaskêko Cree from Moose Cree First Nation in Northern Ontario, is from Treaty 9 territory. As a member of the Doig River band of the Dane-zaa First Nation, Jungen's home community is in Treaty 8 territory. The treaties signed in these territories remain an agreement on how land should be used and shared among Indigenous people and settlers. Yet a ruling that limits Indigenous hunters and fisherman to a “moderate livelihood” lies in opposition to the mining of natural

¹ | https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028614/1100100028615
resources such as oil and forestry that occur on Treaty lands by government and corporations. The seemingly pristine landscape showcased in *Modest Livelihood* reveals passing glimpses of logging roads and compressor pumps as a reminder that not everyone is necessarily approaching the land in moderation.

For their part, *Modest Livelihood* presents Linklater and Jungen as small-scale hunters. The final act of the film shows the two men returning to their hunt in winter, this time without Askoty. Day turns to night and the camera's lens struggles to capture their activity. A shot illuminates part of the screen and the muzzle of a rifle can be faintly made out. As the camera pans, a silhouette is decipherable and there is a second shot in the darkness. It is difficult to tell what has happened until the scene shifts to what is presumably the following morning when the hunters return to the body of a moose. The camera moves in for a close-up of the animal's fur as a hand with a blade begins to cut into the animal's flesh. The film's pace seems to pick up as the two men break down the carcass with powerful but understated confidence.

Here are Linklater and Jungen exercising the traditional knowledge passed on to them, exercising their treaty rights, and exercising their skills as artists. Their actions are not moderate, although perhaps they could be deemed modest. To be modest is still to be aware of one's ability and perhaps to even use that ability with a quiet assuredness. *Modest Livelihood* is quiet; in fact it is entirely silent. The absence of audio is a deliberate artistic choice by the filmmakers as it allows viewers an insider's look into this intimate hunting party while deciding exactly how much their audience is allowed to share in the experience. Indigenous people have always had the right to hunt and fish on Turtle Island, well before the establishment of a treaty system. These inherent rights are strongly connected to the land and, while treaties outline how peoples can coexist in a shared land, they do not supersede Indigenous rights to self-determination. Through their hunting and their film about hunting, Linklater and Jungen bring these issues to attention. Their approach is not flashy; there is no sound, text, dialogue, or narration to dictate their message. Just a group of contemporary Indigenous men, a moose who gave her life, and an immodestly beautiful landscape.

Jenny Western | 2016
Brian Jungen | Brian Jungen employs repurposed materials and a combination of contemporary and traditional techniques; the resulting works often prompt viewers to consider the distances and proximities between cultures, as well as those between humans and nature. A member of the Doig River band of the Dane-zaa First Nation, Jungen came to prominence in the mid-to-late 1990s with a series of masks made of Nike sneakers—a comment, in part, on his own mixed European–Dane-zaa heritage, as well as on the impact of global capitalism on Aboriginal cultures and communities. Later works, shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the New Museum and Tate Modern, among other venues, include giant whale skeletons made of plastic lawn chairs, totem poles made of golf bags and a teepee made of black sofa leather. Recent work focuses on conceptual and modernist forms and their relationship to so-called “primitivism.” Among other honours, Jungen won the first Sobey Art Award in 2002 and received the Gershon Iskowitz Prize in 2010. In 2012, he was included in dOCUMENTA (13).

Duane Linklater | Duane Linklater is Omaskêko Cree, from Moose Cree First Nation in Northern Ontario and is currently based in North Bay, Ontario. He was educated at the University of Alberta, receiving a Bachelor of Native Studies and a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Duane attended the Milton Avery Graduate School of Arts at Bard College in upstate New York, USA, completing his Master of Fine Arts in Film and Video. He has exhibited and screened his work nationally and internationally at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Alberta, Family Business Gallery in New York City, the Power Plant in Toronto and a recent collaboration with Tanya Lukin Linklater at MOCCA Toronto. His collaborative filmproject with Brian Jungen, Modest Livelihood, was originally presented at the Walter Phillips Gallery at The Banff Centre in collaboration with dOCUMENTA (13) with subsequent exhibitions of this work at the Logan Centre Gallery at the University of Chicago (curated by Monika Szewczyk), Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver and at the Art Gallery of Ontario (curated by Kitty Scott). Duane is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.

Jenny Western | Jenny Western is an independent curator, writer, and educator based in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She holds an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Winnipeg and a Masters in Art History and Curatorial Practice from York University in Toronto. Jenny has curated exhibitions for Plug In ICA, Urban Shaman: Contemporary Aboriginal Art, the Kelowna Art Gallery, Portage and District Arts Centre, Ace Art Inc., the Manitoba Crafts Council, La Maison des Artistes, the Costume Museum of Canada, and the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba. One of Jenny’s recent projects includes co-curating “Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years,” a multi-venue group exhibition of contemporary Indigenous art from around the globe.

EXHIBITION 09 September - 08 October 2016
OPENING RECEPTION Friday 23 September | 8 PM
IN CONVERSATION Friday 23 September | 7 PM
IMAGE | Modest Livelihood (film still), 2012

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