



COMPLICITY

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MARK WALTON



HBC store window, featuring HBC Point Blankets and ladies' blanket coat in display, n.d., [1930's?]  
 HBCA 1987/363-W-115/10

## COLONIALISM CHIC: FROM BEAVER PELTS TO HBC BLANKETS

*Complicity is synonymous with being involved in an act of wrongdoing – immoral or illegal. In Mark Walton's project, titled *Complicity*, it becomes a personal autobiographical accusation; a sharing of his journey from unknowingly to knowingly being complicit, in a damaging history surrounding Canada's Indigenous peoples.*

Walton's photographic book opens with a small Polaroid image of a Hudson's Bay Company point blanket. From there, page by page, we, as viewers, become engaged in a visual journey consisting of images punctuated with text that form a fragmented narrative and re-imagined time-capsule of charged emotive realities.

When it comes to being Canadian, arguably nothing is more quintessential "Canadiana", as Walton says in his text, than the Hudson's Bay Company point blanket with the classic green, yellow, red, and indigo stripes. The blanket has been worn in different configurations in Canada's early years. The ongoing promotion and selling of a design associated with this piece of Canadian history is also wrought with colonialist contamination, a history of colonial violence inextricably caught up in the wheels of capitalism. When it comes to fashion, it can never be simply fashion. Fashion can be political as clothing possesses meaning. Clothing relays a great deal about a person and culture's identity and history.

Like Mark, I also spent a great part of my younger years in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Winnipeg is a city that loves celebration; it is a place where history can be seen and experienced in its buildings and street corners. The role of Indigenous peoples in its history is present everywhere. Located at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, the city's name was derived from the Cree name for Lake Winnipeg, meaning "murky water". Where the two rivers meet is also referred to as The Forks.

In earlier years, this area was occupied by Algonquian speaking peoples from the east and north who camped for periods of time. The Anishinaabe, Cree and Nakota peoples used the area to fish and trade. The area attracted fur traders as early as 1738. Cree, Nakota and Metis peoples were essential to the success of the fur trade, working as hunters, trappers, suppliers and traders. The nucleus of the future city of Winnipeg in those early years was a general store located at the famous corner known as Portage and Main.



*Youthful Complicity*  
*Photo by T.J. Walton, Winnipeg, ca. 1972*

It was a gift to my parents on their wedding day.  
A four-point, Hudson's Bay Company blanket.  
Beautiful. Practical. Quintessential Canadiana.

I was born 10 months later.



*Complicity II*



*Complicity IV*





*Mr. Simpson's Daughter*



*Complicity V*



*Immigrant Imprint*



*Badge*







NA-532-1  
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*Diaspora*

*Unsettled II*



*Damnation*







*Mark Walton* is a Waterloo, Ontario based artist and curator who grew up in Winnipeg in the early 1970's. Like many other artists who lived there at that time, Mark's vision was substantively moulded by the historical and cultural events surrounding both Manitoba's and Winnipeg's centennial celebrations in 1970 and 1974. He is currently a devout, evangelical shooter of film.

Mark is the founder of Foto:RE, and a founding director and curator of FLASH, an annual festival of photophy held in Waterloo Region, Ontario. He is the editor of foto:RE|VIEW magazine and founder and curator at The COVERT Collective.

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