

ART SEEN: B.C. should be renamed to reflect indigenous ownership, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun says

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN MAY 6, 2016



Fish Farmers They Have Sea Lice, acrylic on canvas

British Columbia needs to change its name to recognize the need for a new relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people according to artist Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun.

He's even come up with a few suggestions: Northwest Coast Territory or Traditional Native Territories.

Yuxweluptun wants a name change to help make people recognize that most of B.C. is on unceded land that indigenous people have never surrendered by treaty. He'd like to see people vote in a referendum on a new name to replace British Columbia.

Yuxweluptun recognizes that people may have fun coming up with new names that reflect the province's indigenous ownership.

"Some people will say the Province of Indian Land, Native Country, Native Province, or Super Natural Indian Province," Yuxweluptun said in an interview in his studio.

"So they'll come up with some nice names. Some might come up with funny ones – and nasty ones."

A new name for Canada's westernmost province would also mean all new licence plates for vehicles and a new flag to replace the provincial flag and its version of the British Union Jack, an example Yuxweluptun cites as a visual reminder of colonialism.

"I'm asking for a change of name because natives are the caretakers, protectors of the land of this province," he said.

"They always will be. It is important because it will change the idea of where we are in this country."

An exhibition of art by Yuxweluptun opens Tuesday, May 10 at the Museum of Anthropology. Called *Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun: Unceded Territories*, the exhibition continues to Sunday, Oct. 16. The exhibition is curated by Karen Duffek, curator at the Museum of Anthropology, and Tania Willard, an artist and independent curator from the Secwepemc Nation whose traditional territory is in interior of the province around Kamloops and Shuswap.

Many of the works in the exhibition are politically-charged paintings that take on the colonial attitudes and treatment of indigenous people, their fight for control of the land and its resources as well as environmental issues.

Yuxweluptun was born in Kamloops and is of Coast Salish and Okanagan descent.

When B.C. joined Confederation in 1871, only 14 treaties covering the southern portions of Vancouver Island had been negotiated between the Crown and indigenous people. Since then, a section of northeast B.C. was included in Treaty 8. In 1999, a treaty was signed with the Nisga'a to cover their traditional land in Northwest B.C.

Since the B.C. Treaty Commission was established in 1992, a few treaties have been negotiated including one with Tsawwassen First Nation in 2009. A significant number of First Nations groups, however, remain outside of the treaty process and say their rights and title to the land are inherent and predate the arrival of Europeans and other settlers.

As well as a new name to replace British Columbia, Yuxweluptun said he'd like to see National Aboriginal Day on June 21 turned into a national holiday.

He said indigenous people already celebrate holidays such as Christmas and Victoria Day which marks the birthday of the British monarch Queen Victoria who died in 1901. Making National Aboriginal Day a national holiday would help to change the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people.

"I feel that there has to be a change in Aboriginal Day so we can celebrate together and do something together," he said.

"We have to change as Canadians. Natives have already changed. The rest of the country has to come to terms with the Indian."