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Hanödaga:yas (Town Destroyer)

America’s native peoples have been forced to be both inner and outer emigrants since the arrival of Europeans, including British, to Turtle Island. The founding of the United States was arguably the first Brexit, with the following twist: the violent withdrawal of British colonists from the kingdom of Great Britain was also a wholesale withdrawal of British identity in favour of an ‘American’ identity conjured from opposition to taxes and a race war for Indian land. During that British civil war George Washington, known as Hanödaga:yas (Town Destroyer) in our Iroquois language, sent his generals on a scorched-earth campaign calling for ‘the total destruction and devastation of their settlements… that the country may not be merely overrun, but destroyed’. Sixty of our villages, and extensive farm fields, storehouses and orchards, were burned to the ground. More than five thousand of our Haudenosaunee ancestors fled as war refugees, homeless, hungry and dispossessed, from their own lands.

Mantle

Mantle is a large-scale, site-specific earthwork honouring Virginia’s Native American nations that was dedicated last spring onsite at the Capitol in Richmond. I based its form on the shell beadwork of Powhatan’s Mantle, the deerskin object in the Ashmolean Museum thought to be part of Powhatan’s gift to King James in 1608, its thirty-odd spiral-embroidered disks are symbols of the villages and tribes of his chiefdom. Mapping the spiral onto the site is intended as its symbolic recovery as an indigenous territory. Mantle’s landscaping is native plants and engraved on the fountain at its centre are indigenous names of Virginia waterways and tribes. Unlike other monuments at the Capitol – statues of figures associated with the Confederacy, white supremacy and
segregation – *Mantle* is experiential and inclusive, an invitation to move off the grid into the indigenous circle, the harmonious circle ubiquitous in our cultures.

In the summer of 2017 torch-bearing white supremacists marched on the University of Virginia over the planned removal of a statue of Robert E Lee. The next day they clashed with counter-protesters at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville that left thirty-four injured and three dead. In a torpid, perfunctory statement, Trump called for racial harmony, but in subsequent remarks blamed the rioting on ‘both sides’ and questioned whether the removal of Confederate statues would lead to removals of statues of Washington and Jefferson.

In an uncharacteristic move, on 29 January 2018, Trump signed a bill granting long-overdue federal recognition to six of Virginia’s tribes. Despite this gesture, the Trump administration has proven as hostile to America’s Native peoples as it is to its current immigrants – through its rushed approval of the Dakota Access Pipeline, threatening of sacred sites by shrinking Bears Ears National Monument, and a plan to impose work requirements on Native American Medicaid recipients in direct violation of treaties.

**Alan Michelson** (born Buffalo, New York; lives in New York) is an artist, curator, writer, lecturer and Mohawk member of Six Nations of the Grand River. For over twenty-five years he has been a leading practitioner of a socially engaged, critically aware, site-specific art grounded in local contexts and informed by the retrieval of repressed histories. Sourcing from both indigenous and Western cultures, he works in a wide range of media and materials.

Michelson’s work has been widely exhibited and was included in *Indicators: Artists on Climate Change* at the Storm King Art Center, New York (19 May – 11 November 2018), and *Nature’s Nation: American Art and Environment* at the Princeton University Art Museum (13 October 2018–6 January 2019). Michelson is co-founder and co-curator, with the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School, of the ‘Indigenous New York’ series.