

■ RICHARD HEIKKILÄ-SAWAN | Bio

He is a half-breed. He is gay. His Indigenous heritage was redacted from his documents. He was adopted at two months. He was raised a Mennonite. He was bullied for four years at a private school. He was married to a woman. He has four grown children. He came out in November 2014.

Over the last two years, Richard has explored the notion of ‘coming out’ within the contexts of:

- A strict religious upbringing
- Discovering his identity to be the ‘Other’ at the age of thirty-two
- The ensuing deeply personal emotional conflict within the framework of his learned convictions

The emerging question is: “Who is Richard?”

Inspired by artists Jimmie Durham, Kent Monkman and Robert Delaunay, he builds upon notions of identity, race, religion, spirituality, and social/cultural ideologies juxtaposed with his perceived individuality and internalized homophobia. His art practice also investigates theories of the historical significance of colour along with the implications of symbolic form (colour and shape) on the political landscape in an Indigenous/colonial context.

Heikkilä-Sawan’s work utilizes rich, colourful, child-like sensibilities – often incorporating LGBTQ pride colours – as an entry point into the deeper themes that are revealed in shape and meaning.

Commenting on his work, Richard states, “My palette is often rich and vibrant. Breaking down an image into geometric shapes of both positive and negative spaces often implementing Gestalt principles, I utilize the science of physiological optics where colour engages an interaction—the colour of one geometric shape impressing upon and affecting the colour of its neighbour.

With this dynamic infused into culturally current themes, it is my hope that the viewer will walk away from my work with new insight and perhaps changed.”