

Culture Clash (De-taut). 1993

During my time in Quebec, I also went on a field trip to northern Quebec with other Aboriginal students to see first-hand the impact the James Bay dam projects had on the approximately 11,000 Cree and Inuit who resided in those areas. We were also interested in finding out the details of the ecological impact the dams had on the Cree and Inuit traditional territory. We visited Cree communities, stayed on trap lines, and observed the enormous dams and flooded village sites and burial grounds. The community dislocation had proven to be devastating, especially since their traditional lifestyle has been rooted in the land for probably thousands of years. The video, *Place of the Boss, Utshi* reveals the psychological impact these community relocations have had on the people, such as depression and the significant rise of suicides.



Figure 10 Hundreds of drowned caribou caught in the flood gates at James

In terms of the ecosystem, chemical reactions occur when dams flood an area, poisoning the fish and raising mercury levels in the water. This had an impact on pregnant women that resulted in deformed offspring. When the flood gates opened, hundreds of animal species were drowned, such as the caribou shown in Figure 10. The destruction and poisoning of the local wildlife greatly impacted the hunting and fishing of the Aboriginal peoples, because the majority still actively used their trap lines for subsistence. These traditional practises are so significant amongst the Woodlands Cree that their school year breaks

revolve around hunting and fishing seasons. The dams put a sudden end to a way of life and means of subsistence for many communities.



Figure 11. Culture Clash (De-taut). 1993, Longman. 73 x 12 x 18 cm, steel, wood, rocks and leather

It is a rare circumstance for any governing or corporate agency to have permission to flood an entire community or cemetery for the sake of economic development, though with Aboriginal communities this has been a frequent occurrence, without consequence. The dislocation of Aboriginal communities for the sake of economic development has been a recurring act of racial discrimination since colonial contact.

From this experience, the work *Culture Clash* (Figure 11), formerly known as 'De-taut', was conceived. *De-Taut* is a play on a French word *Détente*, meaning an ease of tension in a trigger mechanism — an ease of tension between nations. "De-taut" suggests the opposite: a tension and pulling of a trigger. In particular, this piece addresses the clash of values pertaining to land and natural resources. In governments and big business, values revolve around capital gain, and often the land and its resources are appreciated solely for

their monetary value and for the attainment of economic development. The impact on life and lifestyle tends to be a secondary consideration. The simulated justice scales suspend pans of rocks. On one side the rocks are in natural form, on the other, the more weighted side contains a pan of golden rocks. The scale is constructed with a six-foot metal shotgun with a stylized bow straddling the butt with its string around the trigger, seemingly to prevent the gun from re-cocking.