



Hand in Hand of Stolen Sisters

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Abstract

Hand in Hand of Stolen Sisters is a mixed media digital artwork that brings two figures into relation: *So-nyeo-sang*, the Korean Statue of Peace, and the girl in the Red Dress, remembering Canada's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA People. Set against a photograph of kwikwəłəm territory, their anonymity is intentional, holding space for the thousands of sisters whose names were erased and whose stories were hushed into silence on this land.

Made from the positionality of a South Korean settler and early childhood educator, this work draws on Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing) to hold two colonial histories together without claiming equivalence. The Korean experience of girls and women stolen by colonial violence and the ongoing genocide of Indigenous women and girls in Canada (National Inquiry, 2019) are distinct in their contexts and their lands. What they share is the grief of the stolen, the *han* that demands we do not look away. Moving from the *Perfect Stranger* (Dion, 2007) to the *Not-So-Perfect Stranger* (Dion, 2024), this artwork argues that ancestral sorrow, held honestly, can become solidarity. We do not learn courage from stories held in isolation. We learn it from holding them together.

Note. From *Hand in Hand*, by J. Kim, 2026.
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This artwork frames two girls from behind their hands held at the center of the canvas. We do not see their faces. We see only the quiet gravity of the hold itself, finding each other across histories that colonial violence tried to keep separate. One belongs to *So-nyeo-sang*, the *Statue of Peace*. The other belongs to the girl in the *Red Dress*. This anonymity is intentional. It honours the thousands of sisters stolen by colonial violence, those whose names were erased and whose stories were hushed into silence.

So-nyeo-sang, literally "statue of a girl," was created to commemorate the weekly gatherings of women who stood in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul to protest the sexual enslavement of girls and women by the Japanese military (Amnesty International Korea, n.d.). The statue represents the violent severance from lands, the determination for justice, unresolved grief, and *han*—the Korean word for deep sorrow, anger, and grief (Kim, 2019)—carried by girls and women who survived and who never returned home (Jeong, 2019). Between 1910 and 1945, an estimated 200,000 women were enslaved in military brothels run by the Japanese Imperial Army (Williamson, 2013). As a South Korean settler on Indigenous lands, this history is not a distant ancestral wound for me. It is a pulse of empathy, the inheritance that asks: if you know what it means to be stolen, can you recognize the stealing that is still happening around you?

In Canada, the stealing continues. More than 63% Indigenous women experience physical or sexual assault in their lifetime (Canadian Institute of Health Research, n.d.). According to the RCMP report (2014), 1,181 Indigenous women and girls were recorded as murdered and missing. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (2019) names this violence as targeted genocide—the product of colonial systems that perpetuate violence, inequitable policies, and rights violations across generations. As Amnesty International Canada (n.d.) notes, "these broken structures...erase Indigenous presence, silence Indigenous voices, and sever Indigenous futures." Despite urgent calls to redress this national crisis (Rattray, 2024), many stories remain hushed and unresolved. *Red Dress* commemorates and invokes the presence of these lost sisters and their stories. It "makes the invisible visible," forcing a confrontation with the truth and reminding the country that these lives still matter in the ongoing fight for justice (Amnesty International Canada, n.d.).

The handhold of these two stories coming together acts as Two-Eyed Seeing. It does not claim equivalence between these histories, their contexts, their lands, and their peoples are distinct. What it shares is that my Korean ancestral experience of colonization offers the *eye* of empathy and humility required to stand in genuine solidarity with Indigenous peoples, rather than settling into the comfort of distance. In making this work, I am moving from the "Perfect Stranger"—a distant positionality to claim settler innocence (Dion, 2007)—to the "Not-So-Perfect Stranger"—the awareness that we are all related and connected (Dion, 2024). It becomes the birthing and the beginning of a decolonial journey where belonging is found in one eye, seeing through my ancestral stories to the other to support the sovereign stories of the land I now call home.

Pratt (2019) reminds us that the sharing of stories allows us to discover both difference and commonality across the human condition; it is through this understanding that empathy becomes accountability. By holding the hands of our sisters across oceans, across generations, across the divides that colonial structures have built between us, we find the strength to hold the hands of

the land. We do not learn courage from stories held in isolation; we learn it from holding them together.

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