



Explanation of My Painting “Stolen Lives”

This painting is meant to be a literal depiction of how Indigenous peoples were thought of as less than human, and essentially expendable; being treated more like human guinea pigs (or lab rats) to be used for the advancement of research with no regard for them as human beings.

The top portion of this painting represents the *togetherness* and *freedom* of Indigenous families. The people themselves being represented by children in the painting, and freedom being depicted by the open space and blue skies. This is not to say that Indigenous peoples at the time had an easy or carefree life, or that they were not subject to discrimination, but rather this depiction is shown to illustrate what is being taken away from these people as they are forced into experimentation: Their ability to live with their communities, not being held captive, and in essence, their ability to exist as humans.

The black figures in this painting represent the societal zeitgeist at the time, that being a society which sees Indigenous people as less than human (represented by the thought bubbles showing literal lab rats being pictured while seeing/handling Indigenous people). Society also had laws that allowed Indigenous people to be taken away from their homes and held in residential schools or Indian hospitals. This abduction is represented literally by a single child being dragged away from their ‘freedom’ by a black figure.

The labyrinth with no exit, and barred windows is meant to represent captivity. It was originally designed to be a prison cell (hence the barred windows), as residential schools or Indian hospitals were essentially like prisons for the inhabitants. This prison cell was changed to a labyrinth to further illustrate the idea of the people being used as lab rats (like mice or rats in a maze) and so this structure represents both captivity and unethical experimentation.

The grungy operating room represents more experiments being performed on these people, including surgeries (as depicted by literal dissection) but also a myriad of medical devices used to represent not only the surgeries, but all experimentation including drugs, starvation etc., although these were not literally depicted. Again, these experiments are being performed by the black figures, representing the colonist society.

At the bottom of the painting, we see a dead child being dropped into a dug grave as well as numerous other deceased children who have already been buried. This is a literal representation of how the dead were disposed of, particularly children who died in residential schools, perhaps from malnutrition, experimentation, or other means. In a less literal way, this also represents Canada's ‘burying’ of the truth and glossing over this part of history for so long, thus tying in the more contemporary era.