Jeffrey M. Thomas is an Iroquois/Onondaga photographer, curator, and cultural theorist, born in Buffalo New York and currently residing in Ottawa. His photo-based practice is concerned with showing the perspective of an urban Iroquoian person. Thomas’s research explores various historical cultural resources in order to bring stories, voices, and perspectives into the present.

In 1997 he was the subject of a documentary film by Ali Kazimi entitled “Shooting Indians: A Journey with Jeffrey Thomas, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and in 2008 he was awarded the Karsh Award in Photography.

He has works in private and public collections in Canada, the United States and Europe, including: Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Carleton University Art Gallery, Portrait Gallery of Canada, National Archives of Canada, Oakville Galleries, Kamloops Art Gallery, MacLaren Art Centre (Barrie), Museum of the American Indian (Washington, D.C.), M & T Bank Collection (Buffalo, New York), Musée de l’Elysée (Lausanne, Switzerland), Museum der Weltkulturen (Frankfurt, Germany), Princeton University (New Jersey), The British Museum, London, England, The Ottawa Art Gallery, Wesleyan University (Connecticut), Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Woodland Cultural Centre, Brantford, Ontario, among others.

Recent solo exhibitions by Thomas include: Com-mem-o-ra-tion, MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, Ontario; Who’s your Daddy?: Four Hundred Years Later, Karsh/Mason Gallery, Ottawa; Don’t Mess with the Pediment, Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto; Drive By: A Road Trip with Jeff Thomas, University of Toronto Art Center, Toronto (2008); Jeff Thomas: Traces of Iroquois Medicine, Ontario Museum of Archaeology, London, Ontario (2007); Jeff Thomas: A Study of Indian-ness, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta and Grunt Gallery, Vancouver (2006); Portraits from the Dancing Grounds, McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Jeff Thomas: A Study of Indian-ness, Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon, Winnipeg, Regina, and Toronto (2004-5); Scouting for Indians, The Oakville Galleries (2004); Scouting for Indians, Artspac, Peterborough, and American Community House, New York City (2001); Lurking in the Shadows, Musée de l’Elysée, Lausanne, Switzerland (2001); Geronimo Was in Here, The Buffalo Arts Studio, Buffalo (2001); Ghost Dancing on the Urban Frontier, The Photographers Gallery, Saskatchewan, and, SCOUTING/ For Indians, Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario (2000).

Thomas’s work explores what he calls “symbols of Indian-ness.” He searches for signs of an Aboriginal presence that according to him, “says something about First Nation’s history, evidence that we actually were here.”
In 2000, Thomas began creating scenarios with a figurine he named “The Delegate”. The Delegate is a small wooden statuette, a kitsch souvenir item, reminiscent of the “cigar store Indians” that would have formally “represented” tobbonist shops. “His story begins at the Samuel de Champlain monument in Ottawa and more specifically, he is linked to the Indian man that once knelt at the base of the monument until he was removed in 1999. Long before the Indian man was removed I had contemplated where he might go if he was ever liberated from duty at the monument and a fictionalized journey began.”

Thomas presents the delegate in a number of settings, with differing cultural and historical antecedents. “My study of Indian-ness seeks to create an image bank of my urban-Iroquois experience, as well as re-contextualize historical images of First Nations people for a contemporary audience.” Rather than call for the destruction of these stereotypical icons, Thomas sees them as a catalyst for unraveling the very construction of those stereotypes. Issues of presence and absence inform Thomas’ work. The delegate is a metaphoric presence… watching, seeing, perhaps reclaiming those places he is manifest in.

Please cite in the following manner:

Steven Loft, Acquisition Proposal for Jeffrey Thomas’s *The Delegate at the Highway 17 Hiawatha Wampum Belt, Arnprior, Ontario* and *The Delegate Visits London England, King Street*, accession #42491 and #42492, Curatorial File, National Gallery of Canada.