

Salmon Arm Art Gallery Presents

Sq̓lélten

Co-curated by Tania Willard, Secwépemc and settler



Csetkwe Fortier, 3 in a Roe, 2022

Sq̓lélten (salmon) are critical for all Interior Salish people, artists in this exhibition share about salmon through cultural knowledge, shared resources, story and expression, featuring works by Indigenous artists Csetkwe Fortier, Hop You Haskett, Isha Jules, Aaron Leon, Gerry Thomas, Kenthen Thomas, Louis Thomas, Tania Willard, and the students of Chief Atahm School.

August 27 to October 8, 2022

Opening Day Saturday, August 27, 11am to 1pm

Gallery Hours Tuesday to Saturday, 11am to 4pm

Coffee Break & Artists' Talk Thursday, September 15 at 2pm

Sponsored by



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You are standing on the unceded and ancestral lands of the Secwépemc people.

The board and staff of Shuswap District Arts Council acknowledge that they have benefited from the systems and structures that have oppressed Indigenous people for nearly two centuries.

We apologize for the harms that have been inflicted upon Secwépemc people.

We endeavour to work in accordance with the 94 Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Report. We pledge to support reparations and reconciliation through our mandate, using the arts to build respectful relationships, create cross-cultural community engagement, and to make space for Indigenous cultural and artistic expression. Our policies reflect the importance of supporting authentic Indigenous voices, as well as guiding the education of settler cultures by including Indigenous perspectives in every exhibition and program.

Director/Curator Tracey Kutschker wishes to personally thank Neskonlith Band Councillor Louis Thomas, as well as artists and storytellers Dolan Badger, Mary Thomas, Delores Purdaby, Aaron Leon, Gerry Thomas, Kenthen Thomas and Geri Matthew for their generous guidance, advice and wisdom over the past 18 years. It is now time for settler cultures to take on the re-education of our collective history, and to make the changes that are needed to decolonize our systems and structures.

Curator's Statement

Tania Willard

The artists in this exhibition allow us to spend time, reflect and express gratitude for the salmon gifts our salmon family bring us. This return is a blessing, every salmon run, a return to home, is deeply significant to our swimmer relations and to all of us. Our salmon need us to stand up strong for them, to stand against habitat destruction, to restore places of spawning and to protect what we have left. Secwépemc peoples have done this since time immemorial, we need to listen and witness these ways and come together to dance the salmon, sing the salmon, and especially protect the salmon. Artistic expression is one way to celebrate salmon and never forget their struggle, our struggle; for clean water, for healthy ecologies, lands and waters. Together we can express gratitude for the salmon, to ease their suffering and to spawn a culture that rebuilds the salmon abundance Secwépemc people upheld, for future generations. So as you look at the artworks and notice; brush of paint, glint of sun on water, rainbow gleam all represented through Indigenous cultural knowledge and sculptural representation, ask yourself what you can do for salmon.

Curator's Statement

Tracey Kutschker

The first salmon run-focused exhibition at Salmon Arm Art Gallery was in 2011 and titled *Peak Year*, with a focused response to the unusually high return of sockeye salmon in the Adams River in 2010. The ten artists in that exhibition addressed this mystery and the culture around the run. The next *Peak Year* exhibition was in 2014, titled *Return of the Salmon*. As the twelve artists were preparing their work, they did not know if there would be a return at all. In 2018, the *Peak Year* exhibition addressed the diminishing return in *A Climate of Change*, and now, in 2022, we seek the longer, more complex history of the sockeye salmon within Secwépemc culture.

I have learned through the stories of generous knowledge keepers such as Louis Thomas, Kenthen Thomas and Gerry Thomas how Indigenous food systems are integrated with the land, and how animals, trees, rivers and humans all contribute to and benefit from the existence of salmon. It is critical that we, as settlers, learn more about these deep connections so that we can address the issues impacting salmon.

Hop You Haskett

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|----|--------------------|--------------------------|--------|
| 1. | Respect the Salmon | <i>wood, mixed media</i> | \$1000 |
|----|--------------------|--------------------------|--------|

Hop's message is to respect all living things, and to take only what you need. He selected a mobile as a form for this sculpture because the salmon are able to move in the wind.

Csetkwe Fortier

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|----|-----------------|-------------------------|--------|
| 2. | 3 in a roe | <i>acrylic on linen</i> | NFS |
| 3. | wild bc salmon | <i>acrylic on linen</i> | \$825 |
| 4. | c'wix n'yx'tyx' | <i>acrylic on linen</i> | NFS |
| 5. | policy falls | <i>acrylic on linen</i> | \$1825 |

being secwepmec and syilx, csetkwe's paintings uplifts the voices of the salmon people as they have always been an integral component to both of her peoples way of life, vitality and temixwall living things. using acrylic on linen, csetkwe's calculated approach to leave the rich organic feel of the linen exposed expresses the respect and high regard of the salmon and their position within our life-systems today. linen, being an ancient, eco-friendly fabric that has been used in some cultures, as a trade item/ currency, as well as once being a symbol of wealth in fashion history, csetkwe intentionally uses this material to elevate the value of her works' messages and aesthetic. csetkwe consistently celebrates and addresses the interconnected strengths and struggles between the salmon and her people through her paintings, and by any means she can.

Csetkwe is a multi-gifted artist with her roots in the Syilx (Okanagan) and Secwépemc (Shuswap) Nations. Holding the responsibility and respect of being stamia (two spirit), a sqwuy (mother to sons) and a Traditional Knowledge Keeper, she mainly represents in Live Arts and Visual Arts. She is a graduate of the En'owkin Centre of Indigenous Art, receiving a National Aboriginal Professional Artists' Training certificate and Nsyilxcn Language Program certificate. She honed her love for performance art during her time in the Full Circle Ensemble Program in Vancouver, BC. Csetkwe's performances include those of a Singer/ Song Carrier, Spoken Word Poet as part of the k'wem k'wem slénsténəy – Indigenous Female Drum Collective and as the former front woman in multimedia performance collective Skookum Sound System. As a visual artist, Csetkwe is grateful to contribute to the Kama Collective and Ullus Collective.

Gerry Thomas

6. Salmon and Bear Baskets *birchbark, cedar root* \$200 each

When the bear is fishing, he takes the salmon out of the river and drags it along the land, which nourishes the grasses and shrubs along the river. Then as he is eating, bits of the salmon drop off for small animals like snakes and mice. After the bear has finished his meal, what is left behind is eaten by eagles and other animals. In this way, a bear is able to fish on behalf of many animals and plants because of his ability to stand strong in the river.

Gerry explains that basket making is a months-long process. Cedar roots are gathered early in the spring when the ground is soft. Then in late June or early July, the birch bark is ready to harvest. It is at this time when the bark is cut it will curl away from the trunk. Birchbark baskets are created for a wide variety of uses; for berry-picking, baskets are created in a variety of sizes for different ages of people. For holding water, pitch is used to seal the seams.

Gerry Thomas is a residential school survivor, and has been working for many years to share Secwépemc knowledge through storytelling, traditional art and basket-making. He helped his mother start the Friendship Centre in Kelowna, and learned from his grandmother how to dig roots for basket-making. Gerry generously teaches these traditional skills to others, and develops new and contemporary uses for birch, cedar and willow. He is a well-known bear dancer and story-teller.

Aaron Leon

7. How are you Settling In? *birch, plywood, led light* NFS

How Are You Settling In? considers the process of colonization and how, if we are not actively working towards decolonization and the repatriation of land, we are then working to forward the process of colonization, even if these fights are good fights to better our positions within the framework of colonization. If we are fighting for rights, fighting for a better living wage, fighting for equal opportunities, we are still fighting for a system that is inherently based on the privatization and ownership of Indigenous lands. Benefiting off of the people who were/are/always have been/always will be, here. These ideas were at odds with the consideration Aaron gave to individuals who are trying to make a better life for themselves. Everyone has their struggles; we all want a house, we all want comforts, we all want to live a good life. But that life, in this world as it is, in this society, is built on the violence done to Indigenous people/land.

This work is created with birch bark harvested from a rotten and fallen tree; birch bark that is not as good for basket making but good for starting fires and using for artworks. Aaron chose the font as it is the common currency of the English language and the

regulated domain of academia, Times New Roman. These words co-opt the common phrase for hospitality services talking to tourists, people traveling, people currently dislocated. We often see that allyship ends at the start of discomfort. This common phrase of neighborly small talk to a newly moved in occupant, someone settling in. It states simply: How are you settling in? How are you participating in the framework of colonization? How are you participating in the colonial project called Canada? How are you living a good life? How are you forgetting about the way Canada has treated Indigenous people? How are the systems in place in Canada helping you forget about the violence done to Indigenous people, Splantsin, Secwépemc, qelmuc, Indians, First Nations, Aboriginal, people?

*I wanted the words to advertise its statement,
I wanted the light to come out of the birch bark and bleed all over the walls,
I wanted the light to force itself on the viewer,
I wanted to unsettle.*

Aaron Leon is from Splantsin where he grew up in the town of Armstrong. Aaron is helping to preserve the Splantsin dialect of Secwépemctsin at the Splantsin Tsm7aksaltn (Splantsin Teaching Centre) Society. Aaron has been focusing on promoting a healthier community through arts and culture, by helping organize art and culture workshops at Splantsin. Aaron has worked in community theatre where we explored the history/ stories of Splantsin which has inspired me to continue that story work of bringing our stories and characters to life and currently sits on the board of directors for Caravan Farm Theatre. Aaron is working in photography and art as a way to sort through thoughts and ideas. These have ranged from explorations of early photography and how we use it to perceive by abstracting color, light, and time working with landscapes to create different images to exploring Indigenous issues.

In continuing exploring his identity and Indigenous history, Aaron is currently attending UBC Okanagan in the Interdisciplinary Graduate program researching Secwépemc histories and stories in the hopes to learn more about how we can protect our knowledge in the digital history and keep intact the importance of responsibility, respect, and reciprocity in the digital world.

Chief Atahm School Students

8. Antwan Narcisse, Gr. 4
Alex Copping, Gr. 4

Tylan Tomma, Gr. 4
Dashon Leon, Gr. 3

Chief Atahm School is a Secwépemc immersion school on the Adams Lake Reserve in British Columbia. Chief Atahm School seeks to continually improve their program with the development of an educational framework that privileges Secwépemc knowledge, language, and culture. Every year the students visit the sockeye salmon run, learn about the salmon cycle, and participate in cutting and smoking fish.

Tania Willard

9. Study for a Return to Feasting *digital video, satin ribbon, salmon-skin leather*
Underwater camera by Steven Thomas Davies

A multi-media meditation about the coastal ecology of eel grass, this work explores the effects, after the 1920s, of ocean eel grass habitat destruction by industry and connects those effects from oceans to rivers from human to non-human, through the destructive impacts on salmon (including fish farms and TMX pipeline today). *Study for a Return to Feasting*, is made from salmon leather skins as a projection surface for an underwater video of eel grass beds in the ocean in Snuneymuxw territories. The work asks us to look at how extractive resource industries have affected traditional foods of both human and non-human and how in Secwépemcúlecw we are connected through the salmon. Changes in salmon ecologies from ocean to forest, river to stream and the cumulative colonial impacts on these sensitive ecologies affect all of us. Ideas of 'submerged perspectives' infuse the work from Macarena Gómez-Barris' *'The Extractive Zone-Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives'*. "The extractive zone tends to the regions of extractive capitalism by foregrounding submerged perspectives; it also engages the possibility of renewed perception.." Engaging a positive manifestation of the power of the ways we envision our future, this work considers the sacrifice, the fasting we will need to bring back the health of wild salmon, for a return..to feasting.

Tania Willard, Secwépemc Nation and settler heritage, works within the shifting ideas around contemporary and traditional, often working with bodies of knowledge and skills that are conceptually linked to her interest in intersections between Indigenous and other cultures. Willard has worked as an artist in residence with Gallery Gachet in Vancouver's Downtown East Side; with the Banff Centre's visual arts residencies, fiction, Trading Post and Outdoor School; and as a curator in residence with grunt gallery and Kamloops Art Gallery. Willard's curatorial work includes Beat Nation: Art Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture (2012-2014), co-curated with Kathleen Ritter, Vancouver Art Gallery (touring), featuring twenty-seven contemporary Indigenous artists. Current curatorial contributions include co-curating Exposure: Native Art and Political Ecology for the Museum of Contemporary Native Art, Sante Fe. In 2016 Willard received the Award for Curatorial Excellence in Contemporary Art from the Hnatyshyn Foundation as well as a City of Vancouver Book Award for the catalogue for the exhibition Unceded Territories: Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun. Public Art projects include, Rule of the Trees (2019), a public art project at Commercial Broadway sky train station, in Vancouver and, If the Drumming Stops (2021), with artists Peter Morin, and Cheryl L'Hirondelle on the lands of the Papaschase First Nation in Edmonton Alberta. Willard was recognized with the Shadbolt Foundation VIVA award for outstanding achievement and commitment in her art practice in 2020. Willard's ongoing collaborative project BUSH gallery, is a conceptual land-based gallery grounded in Indigenous knowledges and relational art practices. Willard is an Assistant Professor at UBCO in Syilx territories (Kelowna) and her current research intersects with land-based art practices.

Isha Jules

10. Coyote Helps Create Salmon

acrylic on drywall

NFS

Coyote is always up to something, making it appear that he is connected to us, trying to do good with the salmon, but around the corner, he's got his hand on the pipeline, taking money. In Secwépemc legends, Coyote makes mistakes so that it teaches the children how not to make those same mistakes.

Salmon is the lifeblood of the Secwépemc, the people depend on salmon for their sustenance and survival. There are more nutrients from the salmon at the top of the mountains than in the valley, because the animals bring them up the mountain. In the fall, by the time the salmon reach the spawning grounds, they are scarred, beaten up and sometimes have half their face missing, they really go through it to get back here.

Isha wants the viewer to see around the corners, to move their bodies and experience the mural. This work will be able to be seen throughout three exhibitions; *Sq̓l̓é̓l̓ten, A Place to Belong*, and *Sewllkwe*, so he considers the experience of seeing it through different lenses.

Isha Jules is of Secwépemc, German and Swedish ancestry, and is part of the Tk'emlúpsemc te Secwépemc Nation. His mother was a flower child, and taught him to be true to himself, work for the people, and use all earth's gifts with respect. She taught him art-making skills, providing pastels as his first art material. Isha went to art school at Northwest Indian College in Lummi near Bellingham, and received his degree in Art and Native History. He is currently working on the frontlines of art with Tiny House Warriors.

Art makes Isha go beyond his own limits, further than his imagination. Making murals within his home and in public places, he allows the creativity to flow in the moment. Mural painting requires him to use his whole body, whereas if he just used his arms then he believes the energy and the story would get stuck in his body.

Kenthen Thomas

11. How Man Learned to Fish

audio

Coyote and the Salmon

audio

Sptékwle (*chip-tek-wel-ah*) is a legend that teaches lessons and morals. In the winter, families gather together around the fire to share sl̓xl̓xaya (stories that families tell) and sptékwle (legends that teach). Kenthen has shared these two sptékwle about how the people learned to respect the water and the salmon.

Kenthen Thomas is a performer who captivates audiences with his fascinating retellings of the legends of the Secwépemc, his ancestral land for more than 10,000 years. His late grandmother, respected elder Dr. Mary Thomas, taught him the traditional art of storytelling.

Hop You Haskett

12. Coyote Calling Back the Salmon wood \$6500

Long ago, there was plenty of salmon, they filled the rivers and streams. But now the runs are slowing down. That is why, in this sculpture, Hop has depicted Coyote calling the salmon back, with the hope that they will return and the people will have lots of salmon once again. Hop speaks frequently to elders, and they all tell him that way back, the people would rarely get sick, everyone was healthy because they ate lots of salmon. Now it is difficult to catch salmon, they are scarce, and the people are not as healthy as they should be.

Hop You Haskett is a self-taught wood carving artist gifted with a background in two cultures. Hop's mother is Secwépemc of Splatsin and his father is Chinese. Hop grew up in the Silver Star area with his parents but returned to his mother's home as an adult. Hop's creations bring to mind the special relationship with the animals around us. Hop's deep understanding of Secwépemc ancestry are reflected in his numerous carved texts and wall plaques on Splatsin buildings. The Splatsin and Salmon River cemeteries are dotted with crosses made by Hop to mark the passing of loved ones. Hop works quietly but his works are of enormous significance to all Indigenous in the area.

Chief Atahm School Students

Arya Deneault, Gr. 3

13. Sqlelten mixed media NFS

Chief Atahm School is a Secwépemc immersion school on the Adams Lake Reserve in British Columbia. Chief Atahm School seeks to continually improve their program with the development of an educational framework that privileges Secwépemc knowledge, language, and culture. Every year the students visit the sockeye salmon run, learn about the salmon cycle, and participate in cutting and smoking fish.

Gerry Thomas, Louis Thomas and Jaden Cox

14. Traditional Salmon Smokehouse

wood, bullrushes

In Switzmalph, the way that salmon is prepared for long term storage is different from the methods of the Coast Salish people. Closer to the ocean, salmon is cut into strips and dried. In the Interior, it is sliced into two like a book, with the fins left intact, and red willow sticks poked through to hold it open. This salmon smokehouse shows how the walls made from bull rushes and the roof of cedar bark help hold the smoke in. The fire is built with deciduous wood (pitch wood will blacken the salmon) and placed in the middle. The salmon is then suspended inside the smokehouse, using sticks placed through the stronger tail part. The door is also made of cedar bark, and allows for people to go in and tend to the salmon.

Louis remembers a time when he was a youngster, he went to the mouth of the Salmon River and caught dozens of coho, too many to give away. He asked his grandmother how to smoke salmon, and she explained to him how to slice and open the salmon, and how to build a smokehouse. She then came and helped him do it; working to cut and prepare the salmon as well as building the smokehouse.

Gerry Thomas and Louis Thomas are sons of the late Dr. Mary Thomas, whose work to advance cultural knowledge of Secwépemc people has had far reaching effects. Jaden Cox is Louis Thomas' grandson.

Gerry Thomas is a residential school survivor, and has been working for many years to share Secwépemc knowledge through storytelling, traditional art and basket-making. He helped his mother start the Friendship Centre in Kelowna, and learned from his grandmother how to dig roots for basket-making. Gerry generously teaches these traditional skills to others, and develops new and contemporary uses for birch, cedar and willow. He is a well-known bear dancer and story-teller.

Louis Thomas continues to build on his mother's legacy of inclusiveness by building Indigenous-settler relations that lead to a better understanding of Secwépemc history, and a better world. He credits both his mother and his grandmother for teaching him the language and traditional skills, like how to smoke salmon, how to harvest and gather resources for food and building. He has been a Neskonlith Band Councilor for many years, and as an activist and community builder, Louis has been an important liaison for organizations such as the Shuswap Trail Alliance, Shuswap District Arts Council, Columbia Shuswap Regional District, City of Salmon Arm and Salmon Arm Museum. There is a great deal of history and knowledge within Secwépemc culture, and Louis wishes to pass on as much of that knowledge to the whole community as possible.
