

Beadwork Circles as Resurgent Practices

Panelists: Jaymie Campbell, Adam Garnet Jones, Tania Larsson, Katie Longboat, Christine Tournier-Tienkamp, Theresa Stevenson, and Brit Ellis, with Justine Woods

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Community Building

Abstract

In 2020 beading circles across Turtle Island went virtual, ensuring that community support and kinship ties remained strong despite the pandemic. These virtual spaces extended the possibilities for community growth, creating circles that were more accessible for remote artists to connect beyond colonial borders. Justine Woods facilitates a Beading Circle discussion with artists Jaymie Campbell, Adam Garnet Jones, Tania Larsson, Katie Longboat, Christine Tournier-Tienkamp, Theresa Stevenson, and Brit Ellis in the *Fashioning Resurgence* panel entitled *Beadwork Circles as Resurgent Practices*. The artists share their current beadwork projects as they talk about beadwork as a means for fostering community and kinship, beadwork as a decolonial practice, the impact of COVID on Beading Circles and virtual Beading Circles, commission-based bead work, and the process of educating on how labour intensive beadwork truly is.



JUSTINE

Aaniin everyone, and welcome to Fashioning Resurgence, a panel series co-presented by Indigenous Fashion Arts and the School of Fashion at Toronto Metropolitan University. My name is Justine Woods, and I am the lead facilitator of the Beading Circle at Toronto Metropolitan University. I am so excited to be moderating this panel tonight, discussing beadwork and beadwork circles as resurgent practices.

Tonight we have a group of incredible beadworkers here with us to have this exciting conversation. I'm going to go through and introduce each of them. Adam Garnet Jones is a Two-Spirit screenwriter, director, beadworker, and novelist from Edmonton, Alberta. Adam has recently shifted his artistic practice away from writing and directing film and is focusing on writing fiction and creating custom beadwork primarily for Indigenous artists. His first novel, *Fire Song*, based on his film, was published in the spring of 2018.¹ Theresa Stevenson runs *Iskwew Rising*, named in homage to the resilience of Indigenous women, and is focused on original handmade jewellery.² Theresa Stevenson is Plains and Swampy Cree registered with Fisher River Cree Nation, Manitoba. She is currently based in Toronto. Christine Tournier-Tienkamp is from the Métis community of St. Louis in Saskatchewan and resides alongside the beautiful South Saskatchewan River. She is a Métis beadwork artisan and entrepreneur and draws inspiration from the Métis women in her life.³ Jaymie Campbell is an Anishinaabe woman from Curve Lake First Nation in Ontario. In 2015 Jayme launched her own small business, *White Otter Design Company*, to incorporate her love of traditional Indigenous artistry with contemporary fashion and décor.⁴ Jaymie's work takes inspiration from her Anishinaabe culture, and she owes a great gratitude to the Elders who have taught and continue to teach her the old ways. Brit Ellis, aka *Blu Hummingbird*, is a multidisciplinary artist specialising in beadwork and cosmetic tattooing with a background in community work and counselling.⁵ She creates intricate one-of-a-kind pieces that inspire conversation and connection. Influenced by her love of pop culture, drag, and bold tattoo design, Brit aims to create a variety of works that speak to the complexity of Indigenous identities and experiences on Turtle Island.

¹ <http://www.adamgarnetjones.com/fire-song-novel>.

² <https://iskwewrising.com>.

³ <https://www.ssrivertdesigns.com>.

⁴ <https://whiteotterdesignco.com>.

⁵ <https://www.bluummingbirdbeadwork.com>.

Katie Longboat⁶ is Mohawk and Cree from Six Nations of the Grand River, currently residing in Toronto. She first learned to bead as a teenager and loves to create beaded medallions, jewellery, and canvases. She enjoys sharing her knowledge and love of beadwork through teaching classes in the community and also incorporates beading into her profession as a child and youth counsellor, facilitating beading circles for high school students. Finally, Tania Larsson⁷ designs contemporary northern Indigenous adornment based on Gwich'in culture, created with land-based materials. She is innovative, driven, and dedicated to her art. Through social media she promotes her culture, work, and her passion for reclaiming Indigenous knowledge. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts with a focus in jewellery and digital art at the Institute of American Indian Arts in May 2017.

I'm so excited that we have all of these incredible beadworkers here with us tonight. I would like to start our panel by asking how everybody is doing. What are you all working on? How are we doing in these pandemic times?



ADAM

Sure. It just feels like it's such a hard question to answer these days. I think I'm fine. I stopped beading for a while at the beginning of the pandemic. I don't know why. I felt like it was something that I wasn't able to do for a while. But I've pushed past it, and I think that the different beading circles that I've been involved with have been really important in being able to come back to making my work. Currently, I'm working on a yolk or a cape for a jingle dress dancer. I've got this iris in the middle and it's all on birch bark. The birch bark is an appliqué,

so some of the bark is visible through the design. I'm beading different sections of it and there will be birch bark appliqué all around the neckline, and then I'll be connecting it all with more beadwork. It's the most physically awkward and largest project that I've worked on. But it's been fun.

JUSTINE

Wow. That's beautiful.

⁶ <https://www.instagram.com/katielongboat.beadwork>.

⁷ <https://tanialarsson.com>.

ADAM

Thanks. It's getting there.

**JAYMIE**

Hi everyone. This is actually my first beading circle ever, I'm not going to lie. So bear with me. Actually, some of you might know, but I'm right in the middle of a move and a renovation at our new house. It's feeling like... I don't know, I guess it's really in line with the whole year. Like Adam said, that's a really hard question to answer. But for me, my house is, other than my plants, basically empty. Except I've made this little space for myself that has a table with my beads on it, a chair, and a light. That's where I've been existing at the moment, which is actually

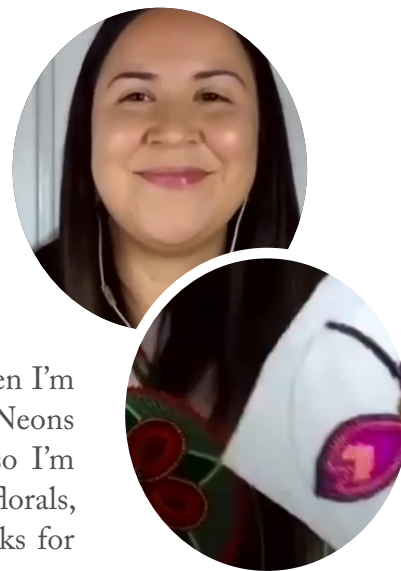
incredibly grounding. I'm grateful for that. But I just started a new pair of gardenia florals. It's just a pattern right now and I'm stitching the centres down. I'm actually prepping for the Toronto Fashion Week online marketplace, and Christmas is our busiest season. So just trying to keep up with all that. Thanks for having me.

JUSTINE

Katie, how are you doing? It's nice to see you.

KATIE

Nice to see you, too. Hi, everybody. I'm doing good. I've been pretty busy. I work in schools, so it's been quite busy since September. Going to work and then coming home to bead has been my way of winding down after a long day. I've been working on a few things. I have some medallions. I have that one, and then I'm doing a matching one, but with much brighter colours. Neons and stuff. Right now I'm also designing something, so I'm working on this big 24"x12" design that's going to be all florals, leaves, and swirls. That's what's next. I'm excited. Thanks for having me tonight.



JUSTINE

Thank you for being here. We're really excited to have you part of our conversation tonight. Tania, how are you doing? I'm wearing a pair of your earrings, which I absolutely love. I wear them all the time. If I could sleep in them, I'd probably sleep in them, but I don't want to wreck the little tufts. How are you doing tonight? Thanks for joining us.

**TANIA**

I'm doing good. Like Jaymie said, this is the busiest time of the year. I'm terrible at actually beading in beading circles because each time I try I will miss a bead, do a line that's completely off, and stuff like that. So I'm just working on backing all of my earrings with caribou right now for December sales. I'm going to be working on that because it's less tiny work and it's more general, so I can actually enjoy the conversation.

JUSTINE

Amazing. Wow, all of that work just blows my mind. Just looking through the screen, I'm already thinking about what I want to try and get on your website. So many beautiful pieces. Christine, how are you doing?

CHRISTINE

I'm doing good. Thank you. I'm actually working on a few small projects. With COVID there definitely was, like everyone else has mentioned, an interest in what we're doing as beaders, and it's just a busy time of year regardless. COVID definitely got people online, and also renewed an interest in the traditional arts, which was really nice. I've had lots of people ask about broaches, so I'm actually doing more of a traditional thing but in different colours and stuff. So, I've just been working on little projects right now.





THERESA

I'm doing this "Land Back" patch because I can't bead when other people are talking. Or I can, but it's just so distracting, and I'll mess it up. This is just easier to do. But I'm also working on this lanyard. Someone has a medallion, and they wanted a lanyard for it, so I'm just copying the pattern. I actually think it's one of Adam's medallions.



ADAM

I was like, "Oh, I like those colours."

THERESA

I'm trying to match your colours. I think your red and blues are different from what I have, but I'm hoping it's subtle.

ADAM

It's beautiful.

THERESA

Thanks. I can't really work on it right now because it's intricate, the peyote stitch. Then, if everyone's talking and if I talk I'll just mess up my pattern. Anyways, that's what I'm doing. I'm working on this "Land Back" one.

BRIT

I'm working on some skull daisies. I made one that was a patch for myself, and now I'm making them smaller. These are going to be earrings.

JUSTINE

Beautiful. Amazing. It's so exciting to see what all of our panelists are working on. I do have a couple questions for our panelists to think about and to hopefully contribute their thoughts on. One of the first things that I was thinking about when putting together some questions for dialogue was how do each of you see beading circles fitting into the broader context of decolonization movements?



TANIA

Just a tiny question to start.

JUSTINE

Just got to hit it head on out of the gate.

TANIA

Go for it. For me, I think whenever you have a table with Indigenous people around it, free to talk about current topics, it's a way to build community and to raise awareness about issues. The power of beading circles is that it's a way to connect with each other. The one I was organizing, there were lots of northern beadworkers. It was so great to be able to share different kinds of traditions that we were missing out on because of COVID. I learned so much about, I would call them sister nations, and about different kinds of ceremonies that would usually happen in the spring. It's so informal and it's a calm space. Emotions don't rise because we're working on something. The way I was taught, is you want to put good thoughts and prayers in your beading, and so you're in that state of calmness. You may look at a topic in a completely different way.

JUSTINE

That's so true. There's a piece there towards building and fostering community and kinship through beadwork and through the conversations that we have while we are beading with one another. Would any of our other panelists like to share their thoughts on the question?

ADAM

For me, one aspect of decolonization is the way that having specifically online circles has worked to erase colonial borders. I didn't realize how much those borders were in my mind, in my understanding of how I saw myself, and my relationship to nationhood. When you have these online circles where spaces, nations, countries, and borders don't prevent people from gathering, it's so easy for people to log on to these supportive spaces from no matter where they are. That's erased those kinds of colonial borders for me in a way that feels important, but obviously I haven't quite figured out how to articulate it yet. I feel like I've built kinship and family with people across borders in a way that I hadn't before. Maybe it's in the same way that dancers talk about when going on the Powwow Trail and making connections with family in other parts of the country and Turtle Island. Maybe there's a parallel there.

CHRISTINE

I think we've been good at creating those spaces in our communities. Now that things have changed, the virtual beading circle continues to create that space to continue conversations and to also expand it, like you were saying, right across borders, making that community even more accessible.

JAYMIE

I should have clarified this was my first virtual beading circle. I've been to lots in-person. I agree with everything that everyone else has said and you have all articulated it so well. Even when we had Toronto Fashion Week, Adäka, and all of those festivals pre-COVID, getting together with people in person and sitting together was so healing. It's so funny, I remember the first Toronto Fashion Week, where we knew each other by our Instagram handles, but we didn't know each other by our actual names. So we were just yelling each other's Instagram handles across the field. We built these online relationships already, and many of us had not had the opportunity to meet in person. I think it goes to that conversation of crossing those borders as well. We were all in one place. Virtual beading circles are an adaptation of something that was beneficial to so many of us in different ways so we can still come together.

THERESA

Yeah, I think we shared a table or something at Indigenous Fashion Arts. We were under the same tent, right?

JAYMIE

We did, yeah.

THERESA

I remember my dogs freaked out one time. It was so embarrassing. This is my first time doing a virtual beading circle. Usually I just do it by myself and listen to podcasts. I've been listening to a lot of Pam Palmater, stuff like that. I find COVID time to be educational time. But I'm interested in hearing about who comes to these online circles because there are a lot of socioeconomic barriers. Some people just don't have good internet on the rez. People up North, they don't have the best Wi-Fi. Is it really accessible? I'm just curious.

JUSTINE

No, that is a really great point. Accessibility and the privilege that is tied to the internet is definitely a big thing to think about here. Yeah. Any other thoughts from our panelists?

CHRISTINE

Just as you mentioned accessibility, that brought another thing to mind. For a lot of people, they're not as comfortable with using a computer. Sometimes I feel like for our Elders or seniors, there's some challenges there if they're not comfortable with using the computer, if they don't have someone in the home, like a grandchild or a niece that could help them. There's definitely some issues around that too.

JUSTINE

100%. So another question to continue with our discussion, would any one of our panelists like to share how they first got into beading or a story that they have that involves a piece that they have beaded previously?

JAYMIE

I laughed right away when you asked that question because I do have a couple funny stories that I can tell. In my family, my grandmothers passed away when I was really young. I was one when my dad's mom passed away. Before that, she had spent a lot of time with my mom beading. My mom is non-Indigenous, but she spent a lot of time with my dad's family. When I was growing up she would always try to pass this knowledge down to me. I was always beading rough pieces, but I was a kid. This one day, my mom was encouraging me to bead because I'd kind of put it down, and I was like, "Mom, I don't want to bead. It's your thing." I just gave her so much attitude about it and I stopped for a really long time. To this day, she brings it up regularly to remind me that I said that to her. But when I moved to Alberta, I was doing a lot of really heavy work. I was working 80 hours a week doing consultation, negotiations, and constitution building. I found every time I was sitting with the Elders, all I had was difficult questions for them about land, rights, development, and all sorts of heavy topics. So it was important to me to start spending time with them in a way that wasn't always these tough discussions in a boardroom. It was important to me to build those relationships and spend that time. As a result, I started working with this woman who was a bigtime known beader in the community. She was tough, tough, tough. She made me this pattern one day, I went home and I honestly worked on it for probably eight hours a day for two weeks straight. It took me so long.

I brought it down to her house and I was just proud as punch. I was like, “Look what I did. I think I’ve got it.” She took one look at it, was like, “Hm,” and threw it in the garbage, no word of a lie, just tossed it right in the garbage. She cut out a new pattern and gave it to me, and went, “Okay, try again. Keep going.” It just became this cycle for a long time where I would be so proud and I’d bring her this stuff. She was a phenomenal teacher, she was also very encouraging and that, too. But I don’t have my first piece of beadwork. It is long gone. I was really lucky to have that opportunity to learn from her though. That was how I first started to get into it.

JUSTINE

That’s such a funny, heart-warming, and great story. I just love that. I love how it involves so much of your family too. It’s a beautiful memory. Thank you for sharing that with us.

TANIA

I didn’t start with beadwork right away. When I was a little girl, I used to do cross-stitching because my mom would embroider. Our baby blankets are all embroidered. She would hand make our clothes, and she would embroider that. That’s what I started to learn. Then I wanted to learn how to bead, so we walked outside the house, went in the bush, grabbed a willow, and made a bow out of it. She taught me how to make a moon, to do that kind of stuff. But for appliqué beadwork, it didn’t look very good when I was learning. My beadwork became much better when I sat next to the late Judy Lafferty and her sister Lucy Ann because they would take your beadwork and look at the back. They were like, “oh, yeah, that is not how you do it.” Then it was really about learning to do extremely neat work, thinking about the tension of your threads, thinking about each line you do and knotting it. All these lessons from sitting next to them completely changed the way I beaded. It’s these small techniques that completely change the way your beadwork looks.

JUSTINE

Wow. That’s beautiful. Thank you, Tania, for sharing that with us. Would any of our other panelists like to share how they first got into beading?

KATIE

We talked about this a little bit last week in Adam’s beading circle as well, remembering the first pieces that we beaded. So I started thinking about that and I dug mine out for today. I made these little hair ties. I was just looking at them now and one of them looks better than the other. That’s often what I tell first-time beaders when they say, “Oh, this one doesn’t look great.” I’ll say, “Oh, your second will look better. The first time you bead, the second

one always looks better.” I learned that at a kid’s camp when I was a teenager. I was a fancy shawl dancer and I wanted to learn how to make my own accessories. I ended up making a couple of hair ties, a choker, and a back barrette for my regalia. I was really inspired by pow wow designs and regalia, so when I first started, I would bead a lot of geometric-style designs. I remember the first set, maybe the second set that I did. It was where you fold the paper in four, and then you cut out the squiggly lines. Then you cut out another one and layer them on top. That was one of the first sets that I did. That’s the story of how I first got into beading.

JUSTINE

That’s amazing. It’s really special to hear how everybody got into beadwork because everybody’s story is so personal and different. I think it’s a story that we remember every time we go to bead. We think back to that first time that we beaded, and we look at our process from when we first started to where we are now and all of the memory that’s tied to that. So thank you, Katie, for sharing. That’s really beautiful. I also have another question for folk. It’s tied in to thinking about our relationship to beadwork on a personal level. I’m wondering if there are any of our panelists who have beaded something or who have received a piece of beadwork from someone that has changed their life or has impacted their life in some way?

TANIA

I’ll share. I was doing my senior thesis at IAIA [Institute of American Indian Arts] and I was working on a mixture of metal cement and beadwork. The beadwork piece took me longer than all of the other time-consuming work. Chasing and repoussé is pushing out and shaping the metal and it takes so much time. Then beadwork. I was like, “Why am I doing two time-consuming processes? This is crazy.” But I think it was really about finding my own voice through beads. To create my own style of work where you could still tell that it was Gwich’in was super important for me as an individual. I beaded, and took it apart, and beaded, and took it apart. It was the longest process. I think it ended up taking me almost three months to do a tiny piece. I realized that beadwork is so intentional. You’re literally making a decision at every single millimetre on your canvas, which is moose hide for me. Sometimes I joke around at the end of the day, it’s like, “I can’t take any more decisions. I stitched thousands of beads today.” Beadwork is just so intentional, everything is placed the way you want. That definitely changed my life because after my thesis piece I had already established my style.

CHRISTINE

I have a story about something that I made last year. I'm part of a group called River Women Collective, which is comprised of Métis and First Nation women from my community and the neighbouring community. Last year we hosted the final installation of the Walking With Our Sisters beadwork vamps here in Batoche, Saskatchewan.⁸ It was a huge installation of over 1,500 bead vamps that had been sent to Christi Belcourt and her team. She led the development of that art installation and initiative to bring attention to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women through the beadwork vamp. Someone would bead each vamp and you could send it in over the years. Each vamp represented the life of a missing or murdered Indigenous woman and the installation travelled across Canada for five years. We had a group of fifteen or so women here and there was a Grandmother's Council that was part of our group. So out of that work, they asked me to make some shawls to honour our grandmothers. When something is so near and dear to your heart you want to do such a good job, so you're honoured, but yet you feel that responsibility. I'm a designer as well, but I'm more comfortable with beadwork. I wanted to make the shawls really special, so I made them out of silk velvet, which I had never sewn before. There were definitely challenges. It was not easy-going, but there was a lesson in that process. Then I beaded a medallion for each of the shawls. Just when they were completed and we were supposed to gather to present them COVID started. So unfortunately it didn't happen yet. Beadwork is always very intentional, and you always care a lot about each piece, but that was the most special project I've done.

JUSTINE

Thank you, Christine, for sharing that story. I wish I was able to see that exhibition. I've seen videos and photos and it's very deep and beautiful.

CHRISTINE

Yeah, it was really moving and it was unique. The last installation was the only time it was shown outdoors. It was along a walking path down to the river and it was really quite something to walk the land in Batoche and the homeland of the Métis. So that was really beautiful. Otherwise it travelled to art galleries and indoor exhibits over the years.

⁸ <http://walkingwithoursisters.ca>.

ADAM

For me, a while back I decided that I wanted to make a medallion that could illustrate my spirit name. My name is Stands by the Fire. When I was given that name, I was really active as a filmmaker, writer, and director. It was an important experience, being given that name. The person who gave it to me told me a lot that really shook me. One of the things he said was that the meaning of my name would change as I grew older and as my life changed. At the time, it was so clearly about being a storyteller who was telling stories that were often really intense. That name, Stands by the Fire, was about being at that gateway to this really intense story place that was really fertile, but also a dangerous place that's a gateway between the spirit world and human world. Anyway, there was a lot there. Then I underwent a bit of a transition in my work and ended up being more of an advocate for Indigenous filmmakers and not making my own work, because to make my own work while being in this advocacy position is a conflict of interest. It was through working on my beadwork that I discovered, or rediscovered, that those creative energies could be directed anywhere. If I wasn't writing or directing for film and TV, that energy could be funnelled into beadwork. I could find expression there. My relationship to my name changed because during that transition in work I realized my name was also about doing everything I could to support other artists who were telling those stories and who were, in some cases, putting themselves in harm's way to do that. So the process of working on that medallion was really about thinking through that name and what this time of my life is and what it means to be somebody who's in that supporting role rather than in the storytelling role on a day-to-day basis... I switched over now to working on a Dolly Parton. I've got somebody who's commissioned me to make a Dolly Parton piece to be framed, so lots of little tiny beads in that face.

JUSTINE

That's so cool. I don't think I've ever seen a beaded Dolly Parton before.

ADAM

I'm sure it's not the only one.

JUSTINE

That's amazing. Thank you so much, Adam, for sharing your story about the beaded medallion and for sharing Dolly with us.

ADAM

We get our inspiration from all places, right?

JUSTINE

That is for sure. Another thing that I've been reflecting on lately when it comes to beadwork is that it's important to think about beadwork as a slow and sustainable design practice. Would any of our panelists like to speak to that?

TANIA

For me, it's extra slow because I usually tan the caribou hides that I back my work with. It starts well before I even draw a pattern. Beading is all about connection to the land and being able to build relationships with community members, hunters, Elders, and young people that you mentor. In that way, it's very sustainable because it's about rebuilding the connections that residential school and colonialism tried to eradicate. When I started this, I did research in museum collections and I fell in love with the colour palette of antique and vintage beads. I decided to exclusively use those beads because they were all dead stock and had been produced thirty to a hundred years ago. They were not part of the contemporary industry for glass beads. I was hoping that it would balance out the usage of silver and gold, which is a mining component and part of resource extraction. But I realized those components had less of a negative impact than fast fashion and using cheap, toxic metals in your work because people value the work more and are less likely to buy a piece for just one season. Increasing appreciation for beading really comes through sharing the work it takes to create a piece because as soon as you know how much work has been put in you'll take care of it. It's something that's precious and intentional. It's not something that you're buying all the time. You have one piece and you really appreciate it, then you might invest in another one in the future. It's not something that pushes production to a point where it's unsustainable. The other thing in making beading sustainable is listening to and taking care of your body. Learning how to stretch your body, how to look up and focus on a point every twenty minutes when you're beading for hours on end, how to exercise your hands, your arms, your back, your core so that you can work out on the lands is important. This work, cutting wood and stretching hides, uses all these weird muscle groups that you wouldn't usually use, so it's necessary to think about your body, not really in a Western way, but in how you can take care of your body so you can do the activities that you want. I may have developed bigger forearms and calves and strong hands, but at the same time that's something that I'm really proud of because it shows the type of work that I do. I guess that's my take on sustainability in different aspects.

JUSTINE

That's so true and that's something I think a lot of beaders don't pay as much attention to as they should, myself included. We all hear the term beader's back

when we start to feel that pain in the back of your neck. That's obviously your body telling you to take care of yourself so that you can continue this work for a long time. It's a very important point. Thank you.

TANIA

I almost want to say, let's all do a group stretch. Lift up your shoulders. Put your hands back. Get out of your position.

CHRISTINE

I was just thinking that as I'm sitting here hunched over.

JUSTINE

Do you have any stretches that you would recommend, Tania?

TANIA

Yeah. It's also important to think of ergonomics in your workspace. So put your feet flat on the ground, even if you're on your couch or your bed, then stand up straight and push your arms back like you're pushing a wall behind you back. It really opens the chest. Stretching your wrists by extending your arms out, hands up, and pressing your fingers down and back towards your body should be done often. Even if you stretch before you start working, you need to warm up your muscles as you go. I had a car accident where someone rear-ended me and it really messed up the nerves in my hands and arm, so my doctor gave me the funniest stretch. I will allow you guys to laugh because it's very funny. It's pressing your forefingers and thumbs together and making glasses for your face, where the rest of your fingers are pointing down along your cheeks. It stretches the whole nerve in your arm. Sometimes when you work a really long time, it feels good. Then just your regular bead stretches, like a cross body shoulder stretch. You just want to get your shoulders back because what usually happens is you end up slouching and the chest muscles shrink. That's when you start having back pains. So you really want to open up. Sometimes it's also standing up, interlocking your fingers behind your back and pulling your hands down and shoulder blades together. Those are just some of the stretches.

JUSTINE

I'm definitely going to use all of those from now on. Thank you. That also actually links into another question that I wanted to ask you all about beadwork as a practice of decolonial care, not necessarily in relation to our bodies, but care amongst one another as a community, especially within the pandemic. How can we think through beadwork as a practice of care? Tania, there's a lot of things that you just talked about that relates to that.

THERESA

I read a book by Christi Belcourt about her beadwork.⁹ I actually didn't get to finish it because I lost the book and I've never been able to find it again, which sucks. I don't think it's being published anymore, which sucks even more. I only read the first chapter, but she wrote about how back in the olden days if someone was going through loss and grief they would give that person beads and say, bead this. It was a way to cope with the grief because beading is a mental task, you really have to concentrate, and you're busy using your hands.

JUSTINE

That definitely relates to the question, talking about beadwork as a practice of care. Thank you for sharing that. I want to know what that book is. I want to read more.

THERESA

I don't think it's a major publisher. I think it was something she had done when she first started or something. I don't know. I would love to finish the book, honestly.

JUSTINE

If anybody in the group knows Christi, maybe they can ask her for us.

ADAM

There'll be a mass run on the printers.

JAYMIE

I just want to add on what Tania was talking about and to come at it from a bit of a different angle. It gets complicated for a lot of us here, who have chosen to do beadwork as a livelihood. There are times when you put your work out there, and you have this huge community of people, but when you have a public profile on social media you can't necessarily control who is coming into your space. So when you talk about things like slow fashion, there is a phenomenal community of beadwork artists and Indigenous people who understand how much time it takes to tan hides, source materials, and do beadwork. There's also a massive community of people who don't understand. What's more, there's a really long history of Indigenous people being devalued and devaluing our own work. My dad tells these stories all the time. Both my grandmothers were quillwork artists. He would help them get the

⁹ Belcourt, Christi. *Beadwork: First Peoples' Beading History and Techniques*. (Owen Sound, Ontario: Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2010).

quill when he was a kid and they would make quill baskets for this gallery that was on our reserve. They would get paid \$5 or \$10 to make massive quillwork baskets. That devaluation of work has continued in a lot of ways. I remember when I started entering these spaces I went to this market, I'll never forget this, and it was in a hipster neighbourhood. It was not an Indigenous art market, so many of these people didn't have as much access to Indigenous art. At the time, there were only two Indigenous artists who were at this market. A family came up to my table asking about beadwork, and I had a piece in a glass showcase, it was sterling silver beads, moose hide, and all this stuff. It was priced at \$200 or \$300 and they laughed in my face. I wasn't hurt by that. I was hurt by the fact that we've devalued ourselves for so long that we can't see the amount of work and time that goes into those pieces. As much as we all have our own practices and we know that value, we're doing that work within our community to recognize those things, there is that outside pressure. Where I was also going with this is that sometimes there's a real disconnect between the individual and the work. People don't realize there's a human being behind that work. I have had so many conversations with people about what we experience. The community of care that beadwork has provided for me is just so unbelievable because when you start having those conversations, you realize that we're not alone and we're all experiencing these things. I just really wanted to share that because people don't necessarily see the behind the scenes work and conversations. We don't just pop online and don't give any care to how we are sourcing materials, or pricing things. There is a lot of thought behind that.

Pricing has to do with care as well. I'm learning to tan my own hides and I have thought a lot about how in a community we traditionally wouldn't have done every single thing ourselves. I have a wonderful community with phenomenal hide tanners and I know they have families with kids. I've known these kids since they were born. When I'm purchasing a hide from them, I know they're not beadwork artists and don't want to be. They want to tan hides and go hunting for their families. For me to be able to purchase the hide from them, that is providing care to one another. When I'm able to price my pieces so I make a living wage, I'm able to pay them a living wage instead of just continuing this circle of undervaluation. That's another piece of care.

BRIT

To just jump off what Jaymie was saying, the Indigenous beadwork community online is unique in uplifting each other and empowering each other to take those steps and make those decisions about prices or sourcing materials. It's a bit of a minefield selling work and thinking of all of these other factors as well. Beadwork is such a slow and sustainable fashion and we're making heirlooms for people, so it is possible for our online community of beadworkers to empower and encourage each other. I have seen and heard those disparaging comments and I've had people try and undercut my prices, but for the most part, the community really has been engaged and supportive. That's been incredible and just something I wanted to add.

CHRISTINE

You've both touched on many things that came to mind for me too. I'm enrolled in the Indigenous fashion support program right now at Toronto Metropolitan University. They just started a few weeks ago. Those are the exact kinds of conversations that we discuss in terms of unique challenges for us as Indigenous entrepreneurs. What's unique is that there is an education component in our businesses because most people don't know what's involved in tanning a hide or the hours involved in beadwork. We have an added set of responsibilities when we become entrepreneurs. We honour the responsibilities to our communities, the connections to our traditions and our heritage that a lot of entrepreneurs may or may not have. As I'm trying to build my business, I want to honour that. How can I serve my community and other Indigenous artists while building a sustainable business? Right now there's a lot of curiosity about Indigenous artisans and entrepreneurs, but there's also a lack of understanding or knowledge, where we have to weave that education into almost everything that we do.

THERESA

On Facebook I'm in different beadwork groups and you see people selling their stuff. They really undersell it. It's tricky because I think a lot of people who sell it for cheap are broke and really need this fast money. So it's a fine line. They do take away, but also babies need to eat. You know?

CHRISTINE

Yeah, exactly.

THERESA

Also, someone made this peyote stitched lanyard for \$80. It was a full-on lanyard she was trying to sell for \$80. I almost died. She could've made \$200.

BRIT

That reminds me, one of the teachings I had when I started beading was around sharing and giving away a lot of my work. I was fortunate in the position that I was in, working other jobs and not having children or other obligations, so I was able to make pieces and gift them before transitioning to monetizing my work. It was slow and happened in a good way. But I recognize that not everybody, like you're saying, has the ability to do that or the ability to wait for something to sell. I appreciate you bringing up that nuance. It is really complicated.

THERESA

It is. I don't have kids either and I think if the ones like us, who are in this position, started selling high and stating, "no, this is my worth," eventually the single mothers who are doing it to get food can start selling higher too. You know? Absolutely.

BRIT

I think that you're 100% right, and that's another thing I love about the community. I see a lot of people using online spaces to promote and share folk that don't have that access and reach as they gain popularity. Even at the last Indigenous Fashion Arts, I had someone that I really admire come up to me and ask my prices and be like, "You should be charging at least double that." That was a great learning experience for me and she was right. So I'll do that too and message and talk with other people because it's a hard position, but you're absolutely right.

THERESA

It's such a fine line with prices too. I always have this conversation with beaders too because it's not everyone's old money. Most people are working if they can these days.

TANIA

For me, that's why I decided to only sell online, because people are just plain nasty in person. Sometimes they're even nastier online, but you can block them, so it's okay. But it's really about setting your boundaries, realizing what kind of interactions you're open to or not, and how much time you allow people to take away from you, especially if they're being nasty.

The thing about pricing is it's built on our ideas of money. There's this workshop called *The Trauma of Money* that looks at the traumas a round money and what kind of relationship you had with money throughout your life.¹⁰ It's a workshop by Chantel Chapman, and is based out of Vancouver. I first heard about it last year when they did a workshop with entrepreneurs and then I took the workshop this year. Before that, I had done a workshop with somebody else around love and changing your mindset from selling your work as capitalism to giving gifts to people. Which is helpful because I think the values of our nations are often contradictory to capitalism. On the government for the arts website up North, one of the calculations for pricing your moccasins is to take your materials, plus your time, and then add profit. That's your price. A lot of people don't have that idea of profits. I think oftentimes profit is almost seen as a sense of greed and taking away something from somebody else. Learning to price your work needs to encapsulate your value as a person and having more financial literacy is key. Maybe organizing that education in our communities would be beneficial, because it's really hard to set up a number. For me, understanding that what I'm offering is so unique and has so much thought, care, and love helped me see the value of my work. People really want something that they can attach all their good feelings to, so it brings them joy whenever they see it. Understanding that my artwork gave that to people and that's what they were buying was valuable to learning that the profit piece wasn't greed. They were not buying an object that was replaceable. It was something unique.

JAYMIE

I just want to add to that. I have huge trauma around money and finances, that's always been there for me. But I know this group of Elders in Manitoba who harvest sweetgrass. They go out, harvest sweetgrass, braid it, and sell their braids. These sweetgrass braids are super long, as long as my body, and are thick and gorgeous. I was buying these sweetgrass braids and I got a lot of people saying, you shouldn't buy medicine. You shouldn't commodify sweetgrass. I am not talking about a holistic shop that's selling sage bundles. I'm not talking about that. But why shouldn't I compensate that Elder for their time? At the end of the day, and people are going to disagree with this, my good wishes don't pay their hydro bill. Our Elders deserve to be able to be warm and comfortable. Not just the Elders, the young community members too deserve that too. I know this one couple who tanned hides where I was living, and they have eight kids. I'm going to pay them a fair living wage for that hide because they're supporting an entire family with that. People do have such trauma around money and pricing, so it's an important

¹⁰ <https://www.thetraumaofmoney.com>.

conversation to have because I think that's care. I know that there are a lot of negative aspects of capitalism and that's an important part of the conversation too, but at the end of the day, it's important that we provide care financially. We have clients and people who reach out to us that say, "I just graduated and this is my budget." I know so many beadwork artists who work one-on-one with those people. It gets complex when you have a social media presence because if you're constantly going, "Look at all these great things I did," you're probably doing them for the wrong reasons. You're considered performative. But if you don't say anything about helping people you're constantly getting criticized from the other side. It's a difficult position to be in. I've done a lot of work to know that what I'm doing, I'm doing for the right reasons. I believe in those things. At the end of the day, I think that's where we have to settle because there are always going to be people who are critical. I really appreciate Tania bringing up trauma around finances. It's so important.

TANIA

On your point, Jaymie, we have to compensate people for their time. There is always that line of, "You can't buy this, you can't buy that" in our community. It's the same for skins. I say I'm buying the bullets for the hunter. Or I'm buying the gas. Or I'm helping them with their payment for their Ski-Doo. Or I'm paying them for the hours it took to skin the animal properly and to pack it in a good way and then bring it back to town. Instead of saying, "Oh, I'm buying a piece of caribou, I'm buying a moose," you're like, "I'm actually paying for all the things that made it possible for that hunter even if it's new mukluks or mitts." That's how I try to think about it because it takes so much work and effort, and you don't even count the amount of times someone may go hunting before they get an animal. You don't count the three weekends they didn't see anything or missed their shot. People will always find something to be nasty about. It's just about learning to be kind to others.

JUSTINE

Thank you for all of that insight. I know everybody who's watching is so grateful for everything that all of you have shared. I have a couple other questions, but it's important to open up the space for questions from the audience and our viewers. Also any other things that our panelists would like to discuss, feel free to share.



CRAIG (AUDIENCE MEMBER)

I have a question. Someone, I think it was Katie, was working on a big tracing and I was wondering how you were going to fix it to the material. I thought the size might be an issue. Could you maybe talk to us about your process?

KATIE

For sure. I trace it onto the tracing paper and then I usually put white glue all around the edges and some dots of glue in the middle. I buy Flexi-Firm by the metre from the interfacing section in Fabricland, so I'll put the tracing on a big piece of Flexi-Firm. I'll take heavy books, and put them on top for a day or overnight so that when it dries, the papers dry right onto the Flexi-Firm and it's nice and flat to work on. Then that's ready to be beaded.

JUSTINE

There's a question from the chat from Kimberly and Janice. They're asking, "What is everyone's favourite way or a style of beading?"

ADAM

I basically do different kinds of bead embroidery. I like mostly everything about it. Although I've tried to do some geometric designs and I realized that one of the things I love about a lot of embroidery is the movement in a design, beading curves, and seeing all of those lines of beads flowing into one another. So I don't often find geometric beading as satisfying. I guess my favourite is bead embroidery with lots of curved lines.

CHRISTINE

I do single needle beadwork. I found two needles are not for me, so I stick to single needle beadwork, and I do a lot of flowers based on my Michif heritage. I start by looking at historical beadwork and get inspiration from that. A fair amount of it was swirling florals with lots of greenery. I don't bead really technically-sound specific flowers, my work is my take on that inspiration and it's very stylized. Then I use lots of pinks and combinations of different colours to make it my own style or what's visually appealing.

JUSTINE

To expand on Kimberly and Janice's question and to expand on what you were just talking about Christine, maybe some of our panelists can talk to where they find inspiration for their work or beading style.

ADAM

Something that people have talked about tonight that's really resonated with me is the idea of making pieces that are going to be heirlooms. That's something I've thought about a lot because I do work mostly on commission. So I get a lot of inspiration from the people that I'm making the work for, whether it's talking to them about plants, flowers, or materials that they have a special relationship to or a story that they want to tell. I did a bolo not very long ago for somebody who had seen my other work. They liked that work, but they said that their grandmother had recently passed and she was a huge card player, so they wanted me to bead a little spade shape into the centre of this floral bolo to honour her. I love that because it's the kind of thing that I wouldn't necessarily think to do. It's not something that was meaningful to me, but combining the materials that I have and the inspiration and stories that other people have is something that's just endlessly exciting and rewarding. I definitely have colour palettes that I'm drawn to and I really love a lot of old-style florals, but my favourite part is really talking to people about what they're looking for and what's meaningful to them.

BRIT

I draw a lot of inspiration from the complicated nuance and layers of modern Indigeneity. I'm heavily influenced by tattoo and pop culture and ways to Indigenize and modernize those images in a way where you can incorporate them to more fully represent all of who you are in all of your interactions and experiences. My work in tattooing has heavily influenced that. It's like earlier with Adam beading Dolly Parton, anything can influence you. You can love anything. There's so many things that make up the layers of our identities. Any way that we can celebrate and express that is really exciting.

JAYMIE

Just to go back, I am so in awe of artists who do most of their work on commission because I found commission started to just suck the life out of me. I found that I was running into a lot of cases where people wanted my work to look like someone else's or wanted themselves reflected in my work. It was really hindering my creativity and I was producing pieces that I wouldn't have produced otherwise. They weren't pieces that you would see on the street and recognize as White Otter. It started to reflect what other people wanted from me and that's when I switched my model. I'll still do it occasionally for a wedding or a graduation, especially if it's somebody that I know and can really capture the essence of that person, but for the most part I really like the creative freedom of being able to make whatever I want whenever I want to make it. I find that beadwork has a way of finding the person that it's supposed to get to. There's a lot of magic in that for me. As far as inspiration goes, of

course the land and being outdoors are incredibly inspirational, but I also get a lot from dreaming. It's quite complicated for me and I haven't talked to more than a couple people about it. I found a few people that I've had a really similar experience with, but I feel like it's deeply personal. I get a lot of inspiration in a dreamtime sort of a state. But when I was working in boardrooms, I was always going into these scenarios where I didn't necessarily want to wear my regalia or ribbon skirt. Now I've been exposed to so much, and there's so much out there, it's different. At the time, I felt like there was a real ceremonial time and place for those things and I couldn't find pieces that would reflect my Indigeneity and style in those spaces. That's how I started. I wanted to design pieces that I would want to wear every single day, not necessarily to be dressed up for an event or a ceremony.

TANIA

For me, I try to connect with my matriarchs through my mother and grandmother, who have both passed away. I bring their work back into my work. It's super special whenever an auntie or some friend would be like, "Hey, this is your grandma's pattern. I thought you might want to use it in your work." What also inspires me is using materials and techniques that are very northern. You might not be able to have your big mukluks, your moccasins, or what your grandparents used to use on the daily, but I strive to create work that has that feeling. That's why I love using the Gwich'in florals. Even then it comes to materials. I love to make big pieces, big earrings so that you walk in and you're like, boom. People see you and stop you in the street. But I was taught to not waste and when you cut a big piece you usually have scraps left over. I'll design new jewellery pieces whenever I have too many scraps. For example, my studs or my smaller pieces are literally scraps. So inspiration also comes from having materials and needing to create with what you have.

JUSTINE

There is another question in the chat from Jack. I'm actually going to let Jack ask it because it's a great question and I feel like I won't do it justice in my own words.



JACK (AUDIENCE MEMBER)

Boozhoo. My question was in regards to Indian bling. That's just what I call it. What I'm referring to could technically be any popular Native style of beadwork or jewellery, but this specific style is similar across the plains and woodlands area and it looks like candy. A lot of people wear necklaces or earrings in street style. So the question is, do we like that Indian bling is not mainstream? That means beadworkers aren't making as much money as they could, but at the same time, this aesthetic rests in our hands as Native communities, not just beadworkers but the Natives who purchase and wear this jewellery. Do we want to see a bunch of white people wearing our Indian bling? Mainstream also means other companies halfway across the world start to copy that aesthetic and profit off it, while having people involved in unethical working conditions. It's complicated. Miigwech, thank you.

THERESA

It's an interesting question because I think that Indian bling copies mainstream designs. It's our way of saying, "I'm still tradish, but I got some flash." I don't know, because I'm from Saskatchewan in an area where everyone wears it, but I don't think it will be mainstream. It's so hard to say because when something becomes mainstream, that means it's got to be popular with white people, right? It's hard to tell what white people would like, and culturally everything comes in waves. For a while everyone was scared of people wearing beards, they thought you were a terrorist if you had a long beard. Then white people started growing them and suddenly they're super trendy. So I don't know. Even if it does become trendy, I think Natives are so Native, we'll just make another thing. We'll just make it our own in some kind of way. I don't know if that answered your question, but it's a good question.

BRIT

To build on what you're saying, Theresa, I also feel that we make sure people are credited. Generally, when I see a celebrity wearing beadwork there'll be people in the comments stating whose beadwork it is, recognizing and crediting it, like what's happening with Rosary Spence right now and her mukluks being duplicated. I think that there are ways around work being copied. And I agree with you, Theresa, I don't know how the waves of the trend will go. As far as owning our aesthetic and work, I see us advocating for ourselves in those spaces.

THERESA

It's interesting because they are trends. They don't last long. They peak and then get tossed away. Everyone was wearing mukluks, right? Now the trend has fallen off and it's just Natives.

ADAM

I think that trends do have a lot to do with it. So much of what's mainstream is not really within our control and hardly concerns us. It's important to know that all of those things would pass and if that does happen, it would be pretty short-lived. Even looking at the styles of patterning and beadwork from the Southwest, that cycled in and out of mainstream fashion for a long time, and the people who have been making that work never stopped. It pops in and out of pop culture now and again. There's definitely an enormous amount of revenue that's lost for the people who are practicing that design work, but at the same time it always remains separate from the mass market and that way of creation never really changes for the people who are doing it, even as those trends come and go. I guess I don't know how to answer the question either.

JACK (AUDIENCE MEMBER)

No. It's a complicated topic.

JUSTINE

That was a great question, Jack. Thank you. Does anybody else have any questions for our panelists? Or is there anything that our panelists would like to share? I know we kind of talked about this throughout our conversation, but I think it's interesting to think about the teachings that are embodied within beadwork. I know Tania mentioned a couple, and same with Jaymie. Within my own work, there is the spirit bead, which is teaching and acknowledging humility. So if there's any other teachings that the panelists would like to share that they have learned within their own journey with beadwork?

JAYMIE

I'll share a final thought. It's not necessarily a teaching that I've received, but it's something that I've come to. When I was a baby, my grandmother passed away when I was one. My parents told me this story my whole life, of how my dad laid me on her chest, she kissed me on the forehead and said, "One day you're going to do great things for your people." When I was growing up, I felt pressure because of that and like that meant that I had to serve my individual small community. I went to high school, then to university, then I went immediately into doing community work and came out on the other end of doing eight years of community-building work with complex PTSD and all kinds of other issues. Not that the work wasn't incredibly important, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. I needed to do all of that. But it's taken me a really long time to learn that community doesn't necessarily mean your own thousand-person community. It can mean our greater community. It can mean our community of beadworkers. For me, changing the lens on what community means has been freeing in that I actually feel like I'm doing what I was called to do and it's more effective because I'm supposed to be doing this work. For so many of us artists, contributing to community and giving back, acknowledging, or caring is such an important part of what we do. It's important for me to vocalize that community can mean a lot of different things. We really need to hold space for that.

JUSTINE

Amazing. Well, thank you all for joining us tonight. Thank you to all the panelists and to everybody who joined in tonight to listen to all the wise and insightful words and sharing. I really appreciate all of the storytelling and everything you shared with us. I'm feeling extremely inspired. Miigwech, Merci, and wishing you all the best.

Panelist Bios



Jaymie Campbell is Anishnaabe from Curve Lake First Nation in Ontario and currently resides in British Columbia.

Jaymie is the designer behind White Otter Design Co., which incorporates traditional artistry techniques with contemporary and personal style. She owes great gratitude to the elders who have taught and continue to teach the old ways. Jaymie wants to inspire people to be both athletic and artsy, scientific and spiritual, warriors and artists. White Otter strives to use authentic materials, sourcing from communities and knowledge keepers. It is important also to learn traditional skills in order to use them in her work and pass them down to future generations. Jaymie is inspired by her Anishnaabe roots, the land, and her family. Jaymie is a wife, daughter, auntie, and sister. When she isn't creating, she can usually be found hiking or canoeing with her pups, and loves to travel, write, photograph, and go out on the land.



Brit Ellis, aka Blu Hummingbird, is a multidisciplinary artist specializing in beadwork and tattooing, with a background in community work and counselling. Influenced by her love of pop culture and bold tattoo design, Brit aims to create various works that speak to the complexity of Indigenous identities and experiences on Turtle Island. Blu's media coverage includes *Flare*, *Luxe*, *The Walrus*, *FASHION*, and *Native American Art Magazines* on TVO and CBC's *Cross Country Check Up* and *Unreserved Radio* programs. Brit is a Haudenosaunee woman of mixed ancestry living in Tkaronto with her dog Morty.

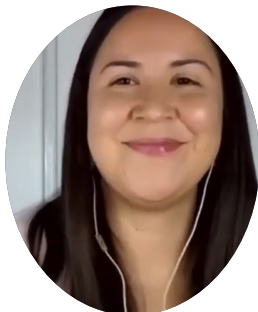


Adam Garnet Jones (Cree/Métis) is an Indigiqueer screenwriter, director, bead-worker and novelist from Edmonton Alberta.



Tania Larsson designs contemporary, northern Indigenous adornment based on Gwich'in culture and created with land-based materials.

Tania makes these adornments with Gwich'in people in mind, so that by wearing her works there is a connection felt to our ancestors, our land, and our culture. In a modern context, Tania uses techniques that have been used for centuries in the design of clothing and tools. By using materials from the land, Tania's audience can connect to a deep respect for the land and animals humans survive from. Tania's process is very important; She use hides she tans herself, along with hair, horn, and antlers that are all byproducts of subsistence hunting. She also incorporate those natural elements with silver, gold, and diamonds to create a striking contrast of textures, colour, and materials. Tania techniques have been passed down to her and some learned, such as chasing and repoussé. This art is central to creating an evolving, northern Indigenous aesthetic that can be paired with our grandparents' traditional clothing by reclaiming and revitalizing traditional work in a contemporary fashion.



Katie Longboat is a Toronto based Indigenous bead artist, originally from Six Nations of the Grand River.

Her beadwork style incorporates inspirations from the natural world, her travels, her family, and uses contemporary materials to create one of a kind jewellery pieces and art works. Katie is also inspired to create beadwork that is reflective of her family and identity and draws inspiration from both Cree and Haudenosaunee styles of beadwork.



Theresa Stevenson of Iskwew Rising is a Plains and Swampy Cree from Fisher River Cree Nation, Manitoba and George Gordon First Nation, Saskatchewan, who is currently based in Toronto.



Christine Tournier-Tienkamp is a beadwork artisan and designer who incorporates prints of her beadwork and paints fabric to create unique art-to-wear designs, inspired by the South Saskatchewan River.



Justine Woods (she/her) is a garment artist, designer, creative scholar and educator based in Tkaronto (Toronto, Ontario). She is a current Doctoral Student in the Media and Design Innovation PhD program at Toronto Metropolitan University and holds a Master of Design from OCAD University and a Bachelor of Design in Fashion Design from Toronto Metropolitan University. Justine's research/design practice centres Indigenous fashion technologies and garment-making as a practice-based method of inquiry towards re-stitching alternative worlds that prioritize Indigenous resurgence and liberation. Her work foregrounds all of the relationships that make up her identity as a Penetanguishene Aabitaawikwe; an identity she has inherited from her family and her Aabitaawiziniwag Ancestors.

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