

Land-Based Fashion: A Leading Fashion Framework

Panelists: Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, Bobby Itta, Tania Larsson, and Amber Sandy, with Riley Kucheran

KEYWORDS:

Indigenous Fashion

Land

Knowledge Sharing

Urban

Community-based Entrepreneurship

Abstract

While the mainstream fashion industry fumbles to balance its capitalist values and commitments to environmental protection, Indigenous creators in fashion have always taken a sustainable land-based approach to design and production. In the *Fashioning Resurgence* panel entitled Land-Based Fashion: A Leading Fashion Framework, Riley Kucheran mediates a discussion with Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, Bobby Itta, Tania Larsson, Amber Sandy on land being at the heart of Indigenous fashion. Each panelist offers different insights into land-based fashion from their unique perspectives as artists, designers, and filmmakers as they unpack what that means and how Indigenous designers can embody the values that come with being in relation to land. The panelists delve into topics about what land means to them, what materials they use from the land in their practices, the connection between food and fashion, land in urban settings, community-based entrepreneurship, and knowledge sharing via social media. The panel also discusses the difference between learning a land-based technique and learning the stories, culture, and values behind those techniques.



RILEY

Boozhoo, hello, and welcome back to the Fashioning Resurgence Panel Series, co-presented by Indigenous Fashion Arts and the School of Fashion at Toronto Metropolitan University. My name is Riley Kucheran, and I'm an Assistant Professor at the School of Fashion, coming to you from Biigtigong Nishnaabeg-aki. We are live today (some of these panels have been pre-recorded), so if you're with us you can ask questions on Facebook and YouTube. Land-Based Fashion: A Leading Fashion Framework is one of the final panel topics, which is perhaps fitting because I think at the *heart* of Indigenous fashion is land. And today we're hoping to unpack what that means and how Indigenous designers can embody the values that come with being in relation to land. I'm going to first ask everyone to introduce themselves and ask, who are you wearing? Or what are you wearing? Because I am seeing some stunning earrings. How about Amber? Let's toss it over to you.

AMBER

[Anishinaabe Greeting]. My name is Amber Sandy. I'm from Neyaashiinigmiing First Nation, or Cape Croker. I work for Toronto Metropolitan University in the Faculty of Science's Outreach Office and I do Indigenous knowledge and science outreach. I'm an artist. I am currently wearing some Carrie Allison beaded tobacco leaf earrings and my Lesley Hampton T-shirt.¹



¹ <http://www.carrie-allison.com>. <https://lesleyhampton.com>.

RILEY

Love it. Tania, how about you?

TANIA

[Gwich'in Greeting]. I'm Tania Larsson, a Gwich'in artist who is residing in Yellowknife. I'm currently wearing my own bead-work, my jewelry, and I'm wearing some moccasins my auntie gave me.²

**RILEY**

I mean, you gotta represent! Alethea?

ALETHEA

Hi. I'm Alethea Arnaquq-Baril and I'm an Inuk filmmaker based in Iqaluit. I'm wearing Creations for Continuity beaded and porcupine quill earrings.³

RILEY

Beautiful. Bobby?

BOBBY

Hi. I'm Bobby Itta. I'm in Utqiagvik, Alaska, I was born and raised here. I am Inupiaq. And I'm wearing Stlaay Cloud-Morrison earrings, and then my atikluk is made by me.⁴

RILEY

Awesome. Miigwech, thank you, everyone. As you can see, we are being joined by some incredible artists, designers, filmmakers from across Turtle Island. So, I'm wondering, given where you are right now, what does land mean to you? What does the land look like? Tania, can we go to you first?



² <https://tanialarsson.com>.

³ <https://www.creationsforcontinuity.com>.

⁴ <https://www.arcticluxe.com>.

TANIA

I think land for me is that feeling whenever you actually go out on the lands, you're walking on soft moss during the spring, you're looking for rotten woods, and you put your hands in the dirt. Or it's also that feeling when you're walking on the snow and you can just hear the crisp of each step you take, breathing in that fresh air and feeling at home.

RILEY

That's beautiful. I'm instantly being transported to the land with you. What are the materials that you are using? For you, is it caribou? What are those materials that you're working with from the land?

TANIA

I incorporate the land by using materials that are from the land. I will usually use animal parts that are from remains of subsistence hunting. It comes from hunters who have been feeding their family and their community. I will use hide that I tan, meaning that I'm also getting rotten wood to smoke it, to soften it and make it into a hide. I use materials like porcupine quills and caribou hair. Actually, some of my caribou hair comes from where Alethea is, from our friend Karen Cabluna. She had put caribou outside to dry in the ice and the sun and ravens got to it. She had this caribou hide that was destroyed by ravens, so she gifted it to me and we did a trade from there. Those are different elements that I use.

RILEY

Awesome. Miigwech. Alethea, how about you?

ALETHEA

When I think of the land, I think of food. The land... it's where our lives come from, our food and the materials that we work with for our clothing and everything. We belong to it, we have a responsibility for it, and it gives us life. I'm not a fashion designer myself, I've made a couple of films that talk about materials and the importance of land and animals that are used in fashion. The materials used around here are sealskin, bone, antler, ivory, you name it. My kid just came in. Say hi.

ALETHEA'S CHILD

Hi.

ALETHEA

Okay, go see dada. Yeah, ivory, antler, teeth, and skulls. You name it. Everything is used.

RILEY

Love it. Bobby, how about you?

BOBBY

I feel like I'm so connected to the land in everything that we do. When I think of land, I think of going to the cabin, going hunting. Up here, we survive off the land. We have to go out and provide for our families off the land, hunting for whales, seals, and caribou. The cost of groceries, it gets so expensive, and it saves us money to go and hunt for ourselves and for other people. I just feel so connected to the land, especially when I'm out there, even if I just go to the beach. Me and my daughter, this summer, we went to the beach so many times. I feel at home when I'm on the land.

RILEY

What kinds of materials do you work with in your designs?

BOBBY

I use a lot of sealskin. A lot of seals washed up this summer. We had a big storm and it was really strange, we had about thirty seals wash up on the beach. I was able to get my younger brother to help me gather some of the seals to see if I could save the skins. These seals had already been dead on the beach for maybe a couple of days, I think a lot of them were sunken seals that people shot and then they just got washed up. In Alaska, we don't have a commercial tannery. We don't do commercial sealing here. If someone has a seal and they don't know what to do with the skin, sometimes they'll offer to give it to me. Or if they went out hunting and it's fresh I'll ask them, "Can I buy it from you?" The main thing that I like to look for is sealskin. Sometimes, I'll use baleen from the bowhead whale to make jewelry.

RILEY

It's sounding like everything is interconnected between food and fashion. It is all one. I love how you're already hinting at the kind of relations that you need to create fashion. It's calling up your friend, calling up a family member, and this beautiful exchange that's happening. Amber, how about you?

AMBER

The land means a lot to me. I currently live in Sudbury, but I've recently moved up here. For a long time, I lived in Toronto. So, I spent a lot of time traveling to communities up here, more northern communities, or just spending time on the land. It's meant so much to me because it's taught me a lot about the work that I do in Indigenous knowledge and science. I also recognize that land can be in an urban place. I guess I'll focus a bit more on that because that's the perspective I can bring to this group. Living in Toronto, you are definitely at a loss and a lack of land space, especially when you live in a small apartment. A lot of us never had yards or that kind of thing. Sometimes land was your small patio, a little park that you could go to close by, or where you knew there were specific medicines you could actually harvest in an area that's urban and accessible.

For me, I have been working a lot with hides. I first started learning how to tan deer hides and I've been working with moose hides and furs now. Fish skins have been my most recent obsession. It's a lot of fun. One of the things that connects me back to land, and even food, has been sourcing those fish skins to learn how to make fish leather. While living in Toronto, it's a little hard. We don't really go out fishing for dinner that often, so I started building relationships with local sushi restaurants and getting extra skins from them because they're typically just tossed in the garbage at the end of the day. Utilizing materials that are typically thrown out has been really important in my work.

RILEY

Amazing. I wonder if anyone else has any comments on urban land-based? We're jumping ahead in our order of questions, but I think this is an important point to discuss; embodying values that are in land-based fashion is entirely possible in urban settings. Also, it sounds like "urban" is not homogenous. There are lots of different areas. If you do have a backyard, you might be better positioned, or if you have that park that's nearby. In Toronto, there are lots of rivers and ravines that we might have access to. Tania, you've done some work in the City of Yellowknife, correct?

TANIA

Yeah. In 2016 we created an urban hide tanning programme with our group Dene Nahjo.⁵ We're reclaiming Somba K'e Park at the city centre because it was known, the City of Yellowknife, to be a great hunting and berry-picking spot. We wanted to showcase the park because it was a camping area. So, we created a space where people could learn how to tan hides, come in, ask us questions, or participate. Oftentimes, when you want to learn how to tan hides you actually have to go to communities, go on the land, and for some people that was a huge investment. We want to be able to bring that to them. It was very successful, especially with children. The schools would bring their classes and from the first year to the third or fourth year we would have repeat students come by. By the third visit, they're like, "I know how to do this. I'll show you how to flesh a moose hide." It was so great to see that was going to be their normal and that it's completely natural to see a hide being tanned.

RILEY

That reclaiming of space is so powerful. We have been removed from the land that became these urban centres, but we are reclaiming. Maybe, Amber, back to you. I'm reminded of that time we did tanning in the quad at Toronto Metropolitan University. It's so powerful to turn a corner in a city and you get hit by that smell or you see smoke. What's that like, to be tanning in an urban place?

AMBER

Yes, it's really powerful. It's hard to describe the feeling that you get from being able to bring something like this to an urban setting to reclaim that space, while also providing the opportunity to other urban Indigenous people who don't have the chance to go to their home communities or spend time on the land, who are really invested and want to learn. It's really beautiful to bring that community together. That's where social media has been a really big help, connecting us with people and groups like Dene Nahjo. Their urban hide camp is such an inspiration. Melaw, one of the people who works with them, really helped guide us in how to set up the camp and gave solid pointers on how you can mitigate those situations of non-Indigenous people coming up to a camp wanting to ask questions. For our purposes at Toronto Metropolitan University, at SciXchange, we wanted to make this event about Indigenous knowledge and science and we host it for a week during science literacy week.⁶ So, we're

⁵ <https://www.denenahjo.com>.

⁶ <https://www.torontomu.ca/scixchange/indigenous-outreach/stoodis-science-hide-camp-2020/>.

showcasing how amazing Indigenous science is and of course we want people to come ask questions and learn about it. We ended up putting together a booth of student volunteers where people could go up, ask questions, and learn about some of the science behind hide tanning. It stopped it from becoming more of a spectacle, rather something that people could come and actually learn about. At the same time hide tanners and participants had the space to learn and continue doing this. It's really important work and I'm sad we couldn't do it this year. We did a smaller version camp that we filmed, so we'll have a virtual hide camp that we'll be sharing. I can't wait until we can all get together and do it again in an urban setting. It's really neat. One of the things that we got to do was take our hides to soak in a river overnight. So, one of the days, we had to leave and go to Humber River to soak the hides overnight, and it was such a cool experience being in this urban park near the water. The next day, as we were going to pick up our hides, a family of deer came down. It was really this moment of — you underestimate how much nature you actually have access to in urban spaces. That was a really neat reminder for us.

RILEY

So beautiful. Someone is telling you you're doing something right. Alethea, Bobby, any thoughts on these? Maybe not on urban tanning. But have you been teachers? Have you had this experience of sharing?

ALETHEA

I definitely don't live in an urban space, but I've gone to school in cities, and I love that you're going to sushi restaurants and getting fish skin. That's just so fricking Native to find something that would otherwise be wasted and make use of it. It's what we do in our communities, whether small or in urban centres. I just love that. There's an artist Tarralik Duffy, her company is called Ugly Fish Design, and she makes jewelry out of found materials.⁷ Lots of people hunt and use the bones, but she chooses to make her collections entirely out of found bones, ivory, and all those things, and people send her materials they've found. That can happen in cities and rural areas. Either way, no matter where the materials are coming from, to make use of something that would otherwise be waste is a principle that I think is shared by a lot of different Indigenous communities.

RILEY

Bobby?

⁷ <https://www.instagram.com/tarralikduffy/?hl=en> and <https://www.instagram.com/uglyfishdesign/?hl=en>.

BOBBY

I think it's really cool that you guys are doing hide tanning classes. That's something that we need here. I only know one other Indigenous artist that lives here, she taught herself how to tan sealskin, home tan. Other than that, we lost our tradition of tanning and so we have to find outside sources to send our seal hides to get tanned. It's really awesome that you guys are hosting classes like that. I would like to be a part of something like that.

RILEY

I think that's a complete possibility with this shift online and use of social media. Do you see that resurgence happening? Do you see more interest in building out that infrastructure for tanning?

BOBBY

Yeah, I think there's quite a bit of interest here. A lot of people that I know, we want to learn how to do it ourselves instead of outsourcing. I had to send all my seal hides that I harvested this summer to San Francisco. I had to ship them instead of tan them myself. Then the product that came back, I know if I would've home tanned it... I tried to home tan two of my seal hides, but they were rock hard. I didn't know what to do. I felt like I was going to mess up. The tannery I used was able to save those hides and tan them professionally, but I would love to learn how to tan and I know a lot of other people that would love to learn as well.

RILEY

That's an enormous expense to ship that all the way to San Francisco from Alaska, and the time required. Alethea, did you have a thought there?

ALETHEA

Yes. It's unfortunate because there used to be commercial tanneries both in Alaska and in Nunavut. When the sealskin bans went into place in Europe and the United States, that basically shut down our tanneries. There's traditional tanning and then there's chemical commercial tanning, and both are valid things that we should have access to. It was really settler environmental and animal rights movements that shut down access to those kinds of things for us, and it's a problem that occurs across the fashion industry. All Indigenous peoples have been affected by those kinds of movements on the fur trade, and sealskin especially. It's an ongoing issue because those pieces of legislation still exist. On top of that, it's spreading. Now ivory has been banned in the United States. The ivory ban was aimed at elephant poaching, right? Inuit, we eat walrus and narwhal, and ivory doesn't just come from

elephants. As usual, we're a footnote in the conversation. We're forgotten about. They say they're not targeting us, but even when people know that we're affected, it's like we're not important enough to be considered in those kinds of legislations. It's an issue across the Native fashion industry. We've all been affected by legislation made by people who say they're protecting animals and the environment, but they're most negatively affecting the people who are closest to the land and working with materials that keep us connected to those animal populations, and therefore trying to protect them as well.

RILEY

Angry Inuk came out in 2016, and you said that those policies still exist. I'm wondering has anything changed since you made that film? Has consumer perception started to change? Any thoughts?

ALETHEA

I think that it's changed within Canada at least. Within Canada, we're allowed to sell sealskin commercially. It's more difficult leaving Canada. I think the demand for sealskin products within our country has gone way up and there's been a resurgence of interest in sealskin as a material from younger designers. We've always used sealskin. We always wear it at home, but the pride in wearing sealskin when travelling outside of our community has been positively affected. There are ongoing efforts to change the legislation in Europe and the United States that is still there. I think we have to confront these things because first it was sealskin and now it's polar bear, narwhal, and walrus. All of our animals seem to be treated like majestic, untouchable creatures by southerners who don't have these animals in their backyard. All of the Arctic is used as a poster child for issues down south. So, it's an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed. Otherwise, what are our artists going to use? We have to be able to use the things around us or else we're importing plastic and so on.

RILEY

So a little hopeful that at least domestically, Canadian consumers' perceptions might be shifting and there might be more support. I could imagine how this Indigenous fashion movement that is so political and land-based might support that changing perception. I'm wondering about the role of community broadly, because I think Indigenous fashion... it's never just about *one* designer. It taps into whole families, whole communities. Tania, maybe if I could throw it over to you. How does Indigenous fashion support entire communities?

TANIA

For me, I always thought that you could work by yourself, or you could involve people around you. I find that it's way more beneficial for yourself, the whole community, and the whole experience to work with other people, whether it's building capacity or creating employment, especially up north, especially if you are from a smaller community or a fly in community. What I always loved about Indigenous fashion is there is already a system in place within a community. I see it happening naturally, where you know that one person who's really good at drawing a purse, for example. You know someone who's really good at doing embroidery, someone who's really good at beading, someone who's really good at cutting your footprint and doing perfect seams. If you think about it in a commercial sense, you already have a production line in the community. My dream is to be able to utilize that, to be able to work with Indigenous makers and creators who have used their skills and refined them for decades. Oftentimes, I see makers with low self-esteem because when they're trying to sell their artwork people are rude and constantly trying to lower their prices. I think that we already have these production lines in our community, and my dream would be for it to be utilized. I love e-commerce, so I'm utilizing that in that sense.

RILEY

Bobby or Amber, do you see parallels in the communities that you work with?

AMBER

Yeah. As I was listening to Tania speak, I was thinking of how social media has impacted us and our community work. For me, completing a pair of earrings, I might've purchased beads from Running Fox Beads, and then I might get some home-tanned hide from Culture Bead. Purchasing from Indigenous communities who are creating access for home-tanned hide, paying the families that are doing that work and building their own shops that incorporate community has been really neat as well. That, along with seeing how many people are dyeing caribou hair or spending time dedicating themselves to creating materials we can then all utilize in our own work.

BOBBY

Community is vital when it comes to creating things. When I learnt how to make the seal gut material for rain parkas I had to find an artist that knew how to do that. Then my mum was also involved in learning. One of my main sources is always my brother. He's our main provider. So, I ask him, "Do you know where to get this?" Otherwise, finding exactly who I can go to and be like, "Can I get this material? Do you have this available?" Then coming together, working together, and working as a community. It's really community

based when you're making items. It's awesome because something that you made doesn't only come from you, it also comes from the people you're supporting. I love that. I'm all about supporting other artists. If I don't have a certain material, then I can reach out to them and support them.

RILEY

It's sounding like any community might have all of the tools already, whether that's an actual nation/community or even in an urban community, where you can rely on social media to find each other. I guess I'm wondering, after listening to all of you, how do we convince people that every community could have a fashion industry, that everyone could potentially use e-commerce? Any thoughts on how we — Yeah, Amber, jump in.

AMBER

What Tania was saying about capacity building and providing opportunities for people to learn from knowledge holders, to be able to go out and learn how to be, to learn that entrepreneur thing that Tania can probably speak to, I think that's a huge thing. Those kinds of opportunities we're seeing now for our communities are what's really going to change the game here. There are a few people who are really good at social media or creating websites or that kind of thing, and the more we share that with our community members, the more opportunity we're going to provide for people to be able to make this their livelihood and actually benefit from it as well.

RILEY

Tania, any thoughts? I see your gears turning.

TANIA

Yeah. In terms of building capacity, it's also creating relationships. When I say creating relationships, I always think about how residential school and colonialism did such a good job at breaking all the relationships within a family, within a community. For me, learning how to tan hides and how to sew was not only about the physical aspect of it, but it was learning to ask my Elders questions, learning to talk to hunters and with other people who are in the same situation as me. It was about building those relationships and feeling strong within a community of people. That is so essential. When we talk about the land, you can't survive on the land by yourself. You always have people around you so if you mess up, someone is going to be there to be like, "You messed up, but let's keep walking. Let's keep learning. Let's keep going on this path." So, it's really about people first. It's about getting to know yourself, honouring our traditions, seeing how precious and sacred those are, and viewing our people as the most important resource. Really putting the land and people first.

RILEY

Alethea or Bobby, do you see that relationship building happening in your communities?

ALETHEA

Definitely. It's right from the hunters. When you buy Inuit-made art, you're supporting a whole chain of people, a whole community. Hunters' skills are kept up by continuing to hunt. The meat is eaten by multiple families. You're not just buying a pair of earrings or a pair of boots or whatever. It's feeding people not just through the money that was made, but by the animal that was hunted. There's a whole skill set that comes with that, of how to process those skins, even how to butcher an animal well so that you maximize the use of the skin and maximize the use of the meat. Then there are language skills that are kept up by being out on the land. Hunting keeps people on the land and knowing the land and place names. There's a whole world of culture that's retained by buying and supporting Indigenous artists. It's not just about one person. It's shared skills. On top of all that, it's an expression of culture and who we are. When you buy art made by Indigenous people, it's encouraging the next generation to keep learning those same skills as well. It's never ending.

RILEY

Bobby, how about you? Are you seeing those relationships forming? How do you continue to nurture those community relationships?

BOBBY

In our community, we always work together, and we are always preparing year-round. When I need something, my brother always knows. During the summertime, he's like, "I got you a seal. You want it?" And I'm like, "Yeah, you can bring it over here." He brought me so many seals this summer. I can pretty much butcher them on my own all the way. He hadn't gone seal hunting in a couple years because our boats were down. He would go hunting with other people, but he wouldn't bring the catch home because, usually, the catch belongs to whoever owns the boat and they'll give you shares of it. He was really happy to have a working boat this summer; he'd be out there for days. Of course, he would have to recruit friends to go out and hunt. He needed other people to go with him for safety and to look out for the seals. It's totally a community thing and it encourages people to go out and harvest things together. If you know someone that hunts a certain animal or if they have enough materials, then they'll give the extras to whoever needs them. Thank goodness for Facebook and social media. They'll post and be like, "Who needs this? Or who needs that?" They'll reach out and they'll be like, "Do you need a seal hide? I don't know what to do with it." I'll tell them,

“I can show you how to get it ready for the tannery, the next process.” A lot of people up here, they don’t know how to prepare hides for the tannery. Usually, they reach out. It’s definitely a community thing. We all work together.

RILEY

I’m hearing that we’re already doing these things. It’s our way of life and perhaps it’s about communicating it in another light as fashion. Perhaps it’s luxury fashion that deserves high price points. It’s just taking what we’re doing and shifting it for new audiences. Now we can do that with social media, with e-commerce. On a more personal level, I was definitely hearing you, Tania, when you were talking about learning how to communicate with those key people. For me, as someone who didn’t grow up in my community, I do have second cousins or third cousins with these skills, but I might not have those relationships. As a queer person, sometimes I feel this animosity, this tension with a hunter, and I think we do just need to learn how to communicate with one another. That’s so important. Tania, do you want to talk about your experience with EntrepreNorth? I’m wondering if you could talk about what that is and how this might get more people practicing land-based fashion?

TANIA

EntrepreNorth is a programme I was a part of three years ago that teaches Indigenous and community-based entrepreneurs how to run their businesses.⁸ The first cohort focused on land-based products and most of the cohort had an online presence through their websites. This year, I came back as a mentor for the fashion programme. It’s been great because, like we talked about, it’s building capacity. I learned my lessons. You make mistakes sometimes, but there’s so much learning in that. Now, I’m able to give back to the community, give back to the community of entrepreneurs who are part of this programme. Initially, I was scared that I was too young to be a mentor, but if you look at our chiefs who signed treaties or run self-governments, at times they were really young. It’s not that Western idea of who should be a mentor, like the old white guy with the white hair. It’s the people who can give back, who can share the knowledge. So, it’s quite exciting because I truly believe that it’s important to share our stories as Indigenous creators in a different light. I truly value my culture and I think that our Elders are so rich in knowledge.

⁸ <https://www.entreprenorth.ca>.

Whenever I get to tell a story, it's really not just my story, it's all the people who've taught me. It's really bringing your whole community with you. I get to share that through social media by showing experiences, processes, and how much work really goes into creating fashion from land-based material. I share how important it is to pay artists fair wages and support them, so that you can impact a whole community.

RILEY

You mentioned sharing. We've been talking a lot about this throughout this panel series, and I'm wondering if anyone had any thoughts on what gets shared and what stays in community. There have been people who thought, keep this in community. There have been others who want to share appreciation, but wouldn't want to share so that a non-Indigenous person could take up this practice and start selling. How do you navigate that tension of what you share with the outside world and what you keep in your community?

TANIA

It's such a fine line for me. I got burnt out using social media to share because in our Indigenous values there's always reciprocity, and I realized a lot of people were taking the knowledge I was sharing, but nothing was coming back to replenish my own bowl. I felt empty after a while. If you are sharing pictures, always make sure you ask the person you're taking a picture of for consent to post. If you're sharing a process, ask for permission to post that. Also, when you're sharing teachings, always include where it comes from so the audience knows that it comes from an Indigenous person and community. We don't want to create a pan-Indigenous trend. We have very specific styles in each of our regions. We want to make sure that even though we can share through social media, if you're trying to copy someone else's style, you have to remember that this is a specific cultural indicator from a specific region. That's what I expect people to know when I'm sharing my work. It's definitely a learning experience, and sometimes you don't realize the impact you have by sharing. It's still beneficial because so many people don't have access to community, to land, or to knowledge holders, but you also have to be cautious of the impact it can have in the long run.

AMBER

I absolutely agree with that. I think that relationship with knowledge holders is important. When I first wanted to learn how to tan hides, it's not a process of Google searching and watching a video online to learn. It was years of waiting until I found a knowledge holder who could help me. Instead of saying, "Can you teach me how to do this? Can I take this?" It was like, "Can I come help you with your work and spend this time?" That will be an

ongoing relationship that I will upkeep for the rest of my life. Those teachings of reciprocity are really important when it comes to these relationships. I definitely share a lot over social media, including my fish skin tanning. For me, it's filled my cup a little bit to see so many people picking up this skill and creating art from it. It's been so amazing to see that. But I'm not sharing traditional knowledge or anything that I have learnt from an Elder, because I would feel uncomfortable sharing that. Hide tanning is one of those amazing things that has happened around the world with different cultures and communities using different techniques. For me, it's brought together a large community of people who are Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Even when it comes to hide tanning, I remember listening to a panel that Melaw was on and she mentioned how there's non-Indigenous hide tanning instructors, and when you're learning from them you're just learning the skill, the technique. You're not learning any of the culture behind it. I think there's value there for people who want to learn that skill, especially for people who are non-Indigenous who hunt and want to utilize the things that they're taking from the earth. In my mind, the more all of us are connected to what we're taking from the land, what we're eating, the better off we're all going to be. Those relationships and connections are so important and integral to us understanding how we can be in better relation to this land.

RILEY

That's so true. So many people eat sushi, but how many of us are using the skins from those fish and ensuring they don't end up in a landfill? Any thoughts on this Alethea or Bobby? I guess we're hearing about this difference between learning a technique and the stories, culture, and values behind that technique.

BOBBY

In my community, we all have our own patterns for our parkas, mukluks, hats, and mittens. For me, I only share my basic pattern. If it's anything further, I wouldn't give to someone else unless they were family. Like I have a certain design for my parkas that was handed down, my mum designed it for me, it's a really specific style and you know that it's mine. I would only pass that down to my daughter. Also, everyone has their own specific trim designs on our parkas, they're called qupaks and they tell you who designed that style of parka. Or the mukluks, you can always tell who designed it. I'm all about sharing basic patterns for beginners. My more advanced patterns, the ones that took me years to critique and develop, it's really hard for me to share those. Usually you can't get our patterns in the store, so they're really sacred because they took so many hours of trial and error to make one pattern. I do teach online and send patterns to my students. I teach traditional atikluk making, sometimes ruff making. I had one student this past week, she was a seamstress and she

lives in Anchorage. I was so proud of this lady because I had worked with her at Alaska Federation of Natives, it's this big convention where we sell Native arts and crafts, and the atikluks she made were pretty good. They were okay. But helping her improve and teaching her how to make the atikluks look professional made me so happy. Now she can up her price. I know she was really happy, too, so it was really awesome. Also, this whole thing on mentoring: even though I'm thirty-five, I had my first student maybe five to ten years ago. She's around my mum's age and I taught her how to make traditional fur parkas. I was teaching someone way older than me, but if you have the knowledge, it's awesome to share that. I didn't think I could be a teacher at the time, I was so young. But she was just like, "I love your work. I really want to make one for my daughter." I was like, "Okay, I can teach you how. Just come over." She would help watch my kids while I would be working on stuff for her, and then she'd go home and sew. She did awesome on a really big project and I was really proud of her.

ALETHEA

I was having a lot of the same thoughts and you just said them all. It's so important to respect sewing patterns because they're such personal things. It's such a gift when someone gives you a pattern. That has to be appreciated because sometimes those patterns have been developed over generations to be a certain way. So, you can't just give it to a whole bunch of other people. You have to ask the person who gave their pattern to you if it's okay to share it with someone else. You start to work with your own patterns over time and alter things. Eventually, the more you make a parka and when you make changes every time, it eventually becomes your own. Then you have the right to share it with who you please. But there's been so much disconnect in our communities due to colonization that a lot of people who want to sew don't have access to their family patterns anymore. So, it's just such a beautiful, touching thing when someone with the skills and the patterns gifts that to somebody who's lost those connections. It's rebuilding those traditions. It's wonderful to see that happen.

RILEY

I think that definitely speaks to the importance of intellectual property, which is another big topic that we've been skirting around in this panel series. To not let someone else take that pattern. To not let a company take that pattern because, from a mainstream, capitalist business perspective, it is just that: it's property they can replicate. It's so important to make sure those remain in families, in communities. Also, I was just reminded, in our Q&A with Christi Belcourt she talked about how she hopes that Indigenous designers go forth with the mentality that when you put something out in the world,

it might get taken. It reminds me of a teaching an Elder shared with me. Once you have an idea and you share that idea, it's not yours anymore. It's out in the world. You can't control it. So, just having that awareness that there are people out there who are looking for these designs, looking for these patterns, looking to exploit them. When you have that awareness, it might help mitigate some of the damage that the fashion industry can do. We're approaching our time remaining. Any final thoughts, final questions that you might have? What do you hope for the future of land-based fashion? Any advice for young Indigenous fashion designers? Final thoughts. Who wants to jump in?

TANIA

I was going to keep going on your thoughts. As we talk about building community, sharing, and being inspired by one another, I think it's so important that we cultivate a practice that I learnt in art school. It's important whenever you are inspired by someone, and it helps you create something, to say their names. It's okay to be like, "My teacher was this," or "I was inspired by this person's work," because that's what it means to build community. That's what it means. That means you're carrying on someone's legacy. Whether they're with us in this world or not, they will always be alive because their work has transcended them through your body. Or even if they're still present today, that's a way of honouring someone. Not if you're stealing straight up, which some companies have done, but within our community, we can support each other in that way.

AMBER

My final words would be on that whole train of thought, recognizing where your knowledge comes from. When it comes to teaching and talking about Indigenous knowledge and science, a lot of what we talk about are stories. For me, when I'm sharing that, it's so important that we know what community those stories come from and who told that story, because that gives context. The knowledge that I have from my own community is so different from the knowledge that Riley has from his community because the topography, plants, and ecology are totally different. It's really important to carry that recognition through in both science work, but also in fashion and design.

RILEY

Bobby or Alethea, final words?

ALETHEA

I think there's been a huge resurgence of land-based fashion. Instagram has been amazing for it. My Instagram is so different from my Twitter and Facebook. I basically almost only follow Native designers. It's wonderful to see the incredible work happening, the resurgence of really beautiful skills. There's nothing in fast fashion that could come close to the Indigenous work that I'm seeing online right now. These pieces I see on Instagram could become a family heirloom. It's just incredible to see the cultural values and morals come through in this beautiful work that carries forward culture, language, and Indigenous ideas of beauty. It's really inspiring to see all of that happening online. I'm loving it. On one hand, it's anti-capitalist. It's slow fashion. But then at the same time, I'm like, "I want to buy everything!" I feel so conflicted.

BOBBY

To all the young people out there that are into land-based fashion, keep on learning. It takes a long time to perfect your patterns and techniques. Don't give up.

RILEY

Miigwech. Miigwech for tuning in to Land-Based Fashion: A Leading Fashion Framework. And gchi-miigwech to our incredible guests. Thank you so much for joining us. My heart is full.

Panelist Bios



Alethea Aggiuq Arnaquq-Baril is an independent filmmaker based in Iqaluit, NU. Raised by a mother who was “passionate about preserving and promoting [Inuit] language and culture,” Arnaquq-Baril was influenced to work to be a voice for Inuit through her films. She researches, explores and documents Inuit cultural practices and the histories of these practices. For example, her 2010 film *Tunnitt: Retracing the Lines of Traditional Tattoo* looks at traditional Inuit tattooing, a custom that virtually disappeared from Inuit cultural practices within the twentieth century. The film documents her research visiting nine Inuit communities and interviewing over fifty elders and her personal process of deciding to get her own tattoos.



Bobby Qalutaksraq Itta is an Inupiaq fashion artist and furrier. She was born and raised in Utqiagvik, Alaska. She is the designer and owner of Bobby Itta Designs and Alaska Fur Cache. Bobby Itta Designs is a brand that promotes and sells handmade Indigenous clothing and accessories, as well as manufactured Indigenous designs clothing. Bobby grew up in a subsistence life style. All her life she was surrounded by hunting and gathering, which inspires her work. She started sewing at the age of 13. In 2010, Bobby Itta Designs was established. After 6 years of designing, she got involved with Indigenous fashion shows. Her first fashion show was in 2016. There she was recognized and more people wanted her in other shows. She also got involved with teaching sewing classes and has traveled in and around Alaska, as well as Canada.



Riley Kucheran is an Indigenous fashion researcher who supports a global community of Indigenous makers who are leading design resurgence. Their experience in fashion retail, entrepreneurship, and Indigenous theory means they see fashion as a powerful tool for decolonization: Land-based Indigenous design relies on community relations to collectively make clothing in respectful and reciprocal ways. They are a member of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg (Pic River First Nation) and an Assistant Professor of Design Leadership in Fashion at The Creative School.



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.



Amber Sandy is Anishinaabe and a member of Neyaashiinigiing, Chippewas of Nawash First Nation.

She is an artist with a focus on leather work, beadwork, tufting, and furs. Amber is a hide tanner and uses moose, deer, and fish skins to make leather by hand. As the coordinator of Indigenous Knowledge and Science Outreach for SciXchange at Toronto Metropolitan University, she is an enthusiastic advocate of land-based education! Her work focuses on integrating Indigenous and western science in her approach to conservation, environmental science, and education. It is her passion to strive for increased access to traditional land-based practices, art, and otherwise, for Indigenous people.

PANEL CITATION

Arnaquq-Baril, Alethea, et al. "Land-Based Fashion: A Leading Fashion Framework." *Fashioning Resurgence*, special issue of *Fashion Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1-22, <https://www.fashionstudies.ca/land-based-fashion>, <https://doi.org/10.38055/FR010106>.

Fashion

at The Creative School



FASHION
STUDIES

FASHIONING
RESURGENCE
INDIGENOUS FASHION DESIGN AND
DECOLONIZATION ON TURTLE ISLAND



INDIGENOUS
FASHION ARTS



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

ISSN 2371-3453

Copyright © 2022 Fashion Studies - All Rights Reserved

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BYNC-ND 4.0)
license (see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)