

Creator Paints the World... ...The Colour of Our Voice



Ivan Whiskeyjack
Chicken Dance, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
Collection of the artist



Alsen White
Art and Ceremony Study, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
Collection of the artist

a spiritual place
is around us,
is inside us,
is time immemorial

we stand in spaces of our ancestors
we walk the trail & pick up what they have left for us
we interpret the world, and
we share what we have been asked to carry

We must speak our truth in words and pictures and songs and movement, or it will be forgotten, it will be lost in the forest of the world that has come to share our lands.

We come from ceremony, we learn in ceremony, and ceremony teaches us how to be, how to be in ceremony, to be in the moment, to create that moment. We learn, we experiment, we seek meaning, we teach ourselves and each other, we laugh and we heal, we build relationships, we build community. We express our life in art. What we create becomes who we are. We are learning about our spiritual self, together, we are art and ceremony. Art brings a humbleness. Art is spiritual practice.

This is our offering.

Curated by Sherri Chisan & Lana Whiskeyjack, faculty and the students in the Indigenous Artists' Program Blue Quills First Nations College for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program, organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta. The AFA Travelling Exhibition Program is financially supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. The exhibition *Creator Paints the World ...The Colour of Our Voice* was made possible through sponsorship from Syncrude Canada Ltd.

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Top: Blue Quills College File Photograph
Photograph courtesy of Blue Quills First Nations College
Bottom: Blue Quills College
Photograph courtesy of Shane Golby



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

Travelling Exhibition 2011-2013 Seasons

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present this travelling exhibition for the 2010-2013 seasons. Currently the Art Gallery of Alberta serves up to 50 venues in approximately 35 communities. Exhibitions on tour from the Art Gallery of Alberta easily adapt to space requirements of smaller venues: schools, libraries, museums, health care centres and other community facilities. The exhibitions are organized in such a manner as to make unpacking, packing, hanging and shipping as easy as possible. Along with the exhibition, each venue receives an Educational Interpretive Guide for the show. These materials enable teachers to use the exhibition within the school curriculum.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Collection is the primary source of works featured in the travelling exhibitions. Other sources for exhibitions may include community partners, archives, private collections and loans from artists. Each year we welcome new venues to enrich their community art through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program.

Our Thanks

The Curators and Artists

Sherri Chisan	Mary Jane Houle	Lana Whiskeyjack
George Giant	Terrence McGilvery	Alsen White
Jody Houle	Ivan Whiskeyjack	

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The Alberta Foundation for the Arts

and to the many individuals, organizations and communities who contribute to the success of the the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program each year.

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The Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program

Creator Paints the World...
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Lana Whiskeyjack
George, 2010
Oil on canvas
Collection of Blue Quills First Nations College



Mary Jane Houle
Art Nouveau Study, 2010
Mixed media on canvas
Collection of the artist



George Giant
Art and Ceremony, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
Collection of the artist

The exhibition **Creator Paints the World ...The Colour of Our Voice** is a profile of a community: Blue Quills First Nations College and the Indigenous Artists' Program offered at the college. The artworks in this exhibition express the directions students can explore in the program and also offer insights into the social and cultural life of a place and the people who inhabit it. The Indigenous Artists' Program at Blue Quills First Nations College has been established along a self-directed learning model; students take initiative for their learning and follow their own interests. The artworks presented thus explore a number of different themes, styles and media.

Many of the artworks in this exhibition concern the human figure, either portraying the figure alone or figures interacting with others. The portrait *George* by Lana Whiskeyjack is an example of this. In Western art portraits have been created for a variety of reasons. Artists may focus on recording how a person looks or, through the manner of their presentation, refer to the subject's character, social position, wealth or profession. Whiskeyjack's portrait *George* fulfills many of these functions of portraiture. First, this work is an unembellished representation of the subject. The artist has been working on a series of portraits of elders from Saddle Lake and so asked George Giant, the elder-in-residence at Blue Quills First Nations College, to sit for her. In this work Whiskeyjack attempts to portray George exactly as he looks, from his grey hair to his lined, round face.

The artist, however, does more than provide a physical representation of George. George works full-time at the college as an elder and performs a variety of duties including story-telling, counseling, and providing ceremonial leadership to both staff and students. According to the artist, George strongly believes in the language, culture, and education program at the college and is always willing to share his time and wisdom. In her portrait Whiskeyjack attempts to share these qualities with the viewer, expressing George's humility, wisdom, integrity, and love for his community. Through her straightforward presentation of George, and especially through the treatment of his eyes, Whiskeyjack successfully presents this man as possessing a kind and gentle soul.

An art style explored with interesting effects by students in the Indigenous Artists' Program is that of **Art Nouveau**. Art Nouveau is an international movement and style of art, architecture and applied art that peaked in popularity at the turn of the 20th century. A reaction to the academic art of the 19th century, the influence of this movement spread beyond Europe and is seen as an important bridge between the historicism of Neoclassicism and modern abstraction.

Art Nouveau is characterized by organic, especially floral and other plant-inspired motifs, as well as highly stylized, flowing curvilinear lines. These stylistic elements are expressed in the mixed-media work *Art Nouveau Study* by Mary Jane Houle. Simplified flowers are 'scattered' throughout the painting, and are especially evident in the upper left and right sides of the work. Line is also an important element in this work with a variety of diagonal, straight, and curving lines being used to focus attention on various components of the piece as well as direct the viewer's eye throughout the work. This is clearly seen in the curvilinear forest-green lines which run down the center of the work. These lines repeat the form of the blue beaded necklace the figure wears and also direct the viewer's gaze down the work to explore other components such as the syllabic script towards the lower left side of the canvas and the stylized eagle towards the lower right side.

A further aspect of interest in this work concerns the use of iridescent gold and silver throughout the piece. This colour choice may be inspired by the paintings of Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), a famous Austrian Symbolist painter linked to the Art Nouveau style. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century Klimt's critically acclaimed paintings were characterized by the prominent use of gold leaf and ornamental patterning. Houle's investigation of patterning and the use of gold paint, gold beads, and other iridescent colours in the work, a combination which creates a shimmering effect over the entire piece, is reminiscent of the colour pallet used by this earlier artist. As shared by Mary Jane Houle, her aim for this project

...was to represent and understand the different mediums by using colors such as metallic and acrylic paints...colors such as teal, red, yellow and mixing paints to create a new method...My style is simple and I love the texture of paints...The symbolism is to create the Spiritworld.... I also love our cahkipehikana (syllabics), very powerful and mesmerized by our people.

One very important art movement which began in the late 19th century was that of **Expressionism**, influences of which are seen in the painting *Art and Ceremony* by George Giant. Expressionism refers to an aesthetic style of expression in art history and criticism that developed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Artists affiliated with this movement deliberately turned away from the representation of nature as a primary purpose of art and broke with the traditional aims of European art that had been in practice since the Renaissance. Expressionist artists proclaimed the direct rendering of emotions and feelings as the only true goal of art. The formal elements of line, shape and colour were to be used entirely for their emotional, expressive and symbolic possibilities.

Giant's painting *Art and Ceremony* expresses many of the characteristics of Expressionism. In this work the central figure is treated in a very stylized manner, being a symbol of a human or spiritual being rather than a specific individual. Such simplification is also witnessed in the central heart element and the representation of the sweat-lodge. The artist also makes use of very expressive lines throughout the work. Curvilinear lines radiate up and out from the sweat lodge at the bottom of the painting, balanced by flowing lines, which form the hair of the figure, down towards the sweatlodge. These lines unite the various elements of the painting and provide the work with a vibrant sense of energy.

The painting *Art and Ceremony* is also replete with symbolism. According to the artist the painting is about a spiritual vision and is what a person would see when praying. When the artist prays or meditates he sees a spirit without a face. The heart is a reminder of where to be when in ceremony; a person's prayers need to come from the heart and the heart has to be open as it guides one in ceremony. The dome represents the sweat lodge, which protects a person in ceremony and seals positive energy. Colour is also used symbolically in this work. Most of the colours used are pastel tints rather than being pure or vibrant colours. This use of pastel colours provides the work with a 'softness', reflecting the peaceful moment of prayer and ceremony. The colour of the heart is also the colour of the peoples' blood.