

VANCOUVER BIENNALE

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VANCOUVER BIENNALE 2018-2020

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WEAVING CULTURAL IDENTITIES

Celebrating Heritage and Textile Traditions



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About the Biennale

About The Exhibition

In a contemporary, global society of mixed cultures and values, how do we begin to navigate heritage and diverse beliefs? How do we share sacred space? How do we come together to understand each other experiences influenced by centuries of rootedness or generations of movement? What can we learn from reflecting within ourselves in the context of our personal and ancestral histories? What can we learn from each other within our contemporary interactions?

Weaving Cultural Identities brings together diverse communities to reflect on these questions, and develop dialogue around local Indigenous and migrant histories. This project engages creative individuals from various ethnicities to work with Muslim and Indigenous artists to reconcile obscured traditions, to share, learn and celebrate cultural knowledge through symbolism and self-identification through textile traditions. This project also becomes an exploration of the multiple narratives of Vancouver, developed through storytelling from diverse perspectives.

For this exhibition, textile artists and graphic artists of different backgrounds and artistic disciplines were asked to work together as collaborators. They collaborated based on their own experiences and histories **to create** a series of works that celebrate the rich significance of textile arts (both in a sacred and historic sense) that focused on the prayer rug and similar weaving traditions. Together, participating artists developed a platform and process for community dialogue through arts-based discussions around often complex issues of belonging, displacement, diaspora, assimilation, and honouring the land.

Weaving and textile arts are universal media that transcend time, space, and language; many textile designs, including those found in prayer rugs, have a unique ability to connect communities through the depiction of local motifs, patterns, materials, and landmarks. By connecting communities through place, and by integrating motifs and design elements from each cultural and artistic tradition, this project encourages artists to dig deeper into their own sense of cultural identity, while representing part of a larger, local narrative that honours ancestral legacies and celebrates inter-cultural relations. This is an opportunity to learn about each other through differences in textile techniques, rooted in cultural tradition, symbols, materials, and colours – celebrating uniqueness while also plainly seeing things that connect us beyond space and time.

Zarina Laalo
Curator



“This project encourages artists to dig deeper to explore their own sense of cultural identity, while representing part of a larger, local narrative that honours ancestral legacies and celebrates inter-cultural relations”





Prayer Rug

Textile Artist: Debra Sparrow

Material: Hand-spun woven sheep's wool

Dimensions: 54" x 21"

ABOUT THE WORK

According to Debra Sparrow, all weavings have a purpose and a destiny. Sparrow's creative inspiration has been largely influenced by her personal journey in connecting to the spirit world; she embraced the idea of a prayer rug readily and instinctually. The artist's woven works and designs are a means of communication between herself and her ancestors, who guide her hands and spirit through the process. With this gift, it is up to Sparrow to determine what these messages are and to be open to the lessons that are passed on to her through this process. In the end, the weavings are often closely related to identity and her Musqueam heritage, yet can also speak to very relatable stories of people and land.

PROCESS

Knowing this weaving would take its place amongst others, Debra Sparrow was very conscious of her technical approach to this piece. She asked herself important and difficult questions such as, "In what ways do others with different backgrounds and values feel similarly about prayer, spirit, and religion?" In Sparrow's experience as a knowledge-keeper, she recognizes that as much as cultures are different, human beings are also ultimately the same. This sentiment is carried through in this weaving particularly in her selection of design elements and intuitively chosen colours and patterns. The artist acknowledges that in approaching these topics, she must offer strength and sincerity, presenting a genuine piece of herself and her people's history into this piece to help shift the future in a positive direction.



Reflections

Textile Artist: Robyn Sparrow

Material: Hand-spun woven sheep's wool

Dimensions: 56" x 22.5"

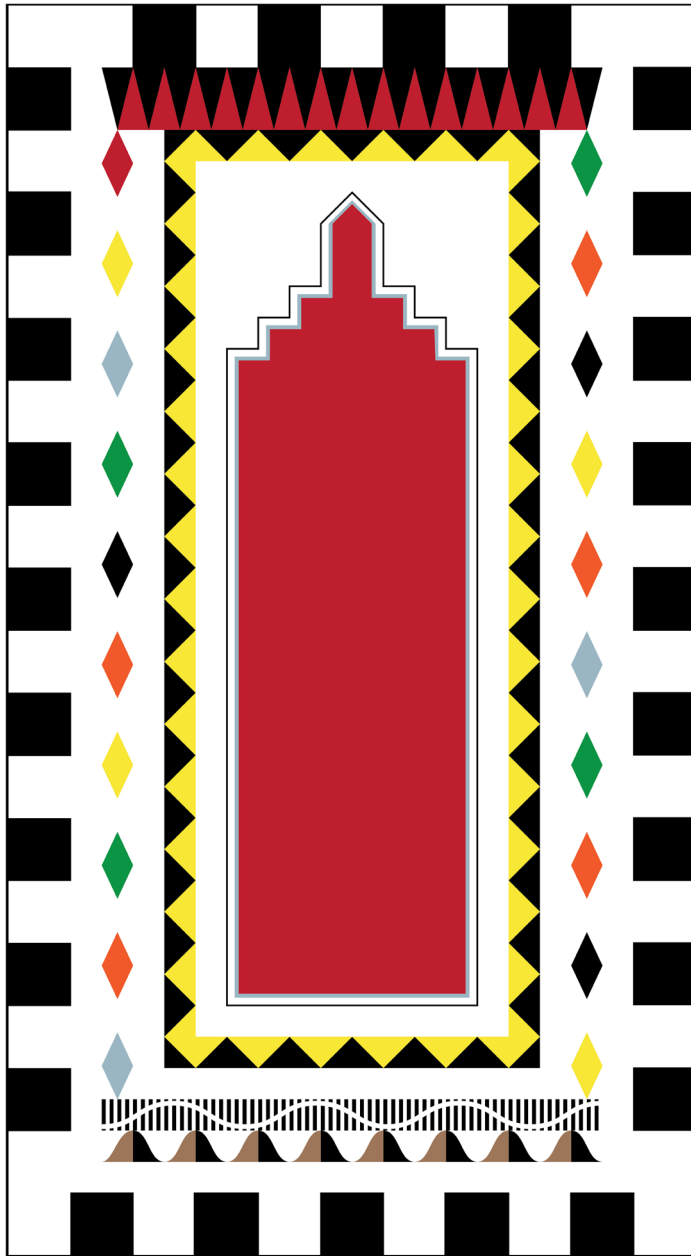
ABOUT THE WORK

The work *Reflections* by Robyn Sparrow is both a narrative as well as an aid for coping with the ebbs and flows of life's experiences. The artist has strategically placed a symmetrical pattern to show periods of intensity, representing a lifecycle, but offers relief in the center with a visual representation of calm. For Sparrow, this piece represents the vulnerability one experiences when there is a disconnect between mind, body, and spirit - a conflict in any parts of these states of being can drastically shift the balance of an individual. Despite this, the work demonstrates how life begins to move forward, as represented by the land and the waves. Sparrow reflects instead on the moments of calm among the chaos, a place that can be internal or spiritual, where you can find strength and calm to move forward.

This weaving is markedly different from what Sparrow thought it would be. The artist had difficulty with both the beginning and ending because it was an articulation of her own personal feelings. By letting herself give up control of the process, and allowing herself unfiltered expression, Sparrow was given an entirely unique work that represents the flow and change in one's spirit. Visualized, these universal experiences are a way for Sparrow to connect with others and to offer a bridge of support to those who may be facing their own struggles amidst chaos through what Sparrow calls, "pulling out brightness." *Reflections* represents a need to look internally and to ask for guidance in order to find balance in the body, mind, and spirit - to learn from our past, anticipate the future, and to always take time to recognize the beauty that can be found between these moments.

PROCESS

Reflections is a personally reflective piece. The technical and visual choices however suggest a timeline connecting both the past and the present. While thinking back to her ancestors, Robyn Sparrow was impelled to include the checkerboard pattern that is woven throughout the piece. This pattern is often used in Coast Salish weavings to echo traditional cedar weaving baskets, a practice that connected Indigenous individuals to previous generations, representing their stories. Robyn Sparrow sees the colour combination in this work as straying from tradition: the vibrant blue that was instinctually chosen is a bold and contemporary. Despite this uncommon choice, the blue became one of the most symbolically representative colours in the work, indicating the serene blue skies, the uplifting blue butterfly, and the flowing waves that continue throughout the design. While Sparrow is still cautious in stepping out of her comfort zone with these colours, she submitted herself to the design and choices that presented themselves through the process. This acceptance is an approach she encourages in others who are going through conflicts within their spiritual, physical, and emotional lives.



Skw'enmáylh - Prayer

Graphic Artist: Michelle Nahanee

Textile Artist: Angela George

Material: Hand-spun woven sheep's wool

Dimensions: 25" x 19.5"

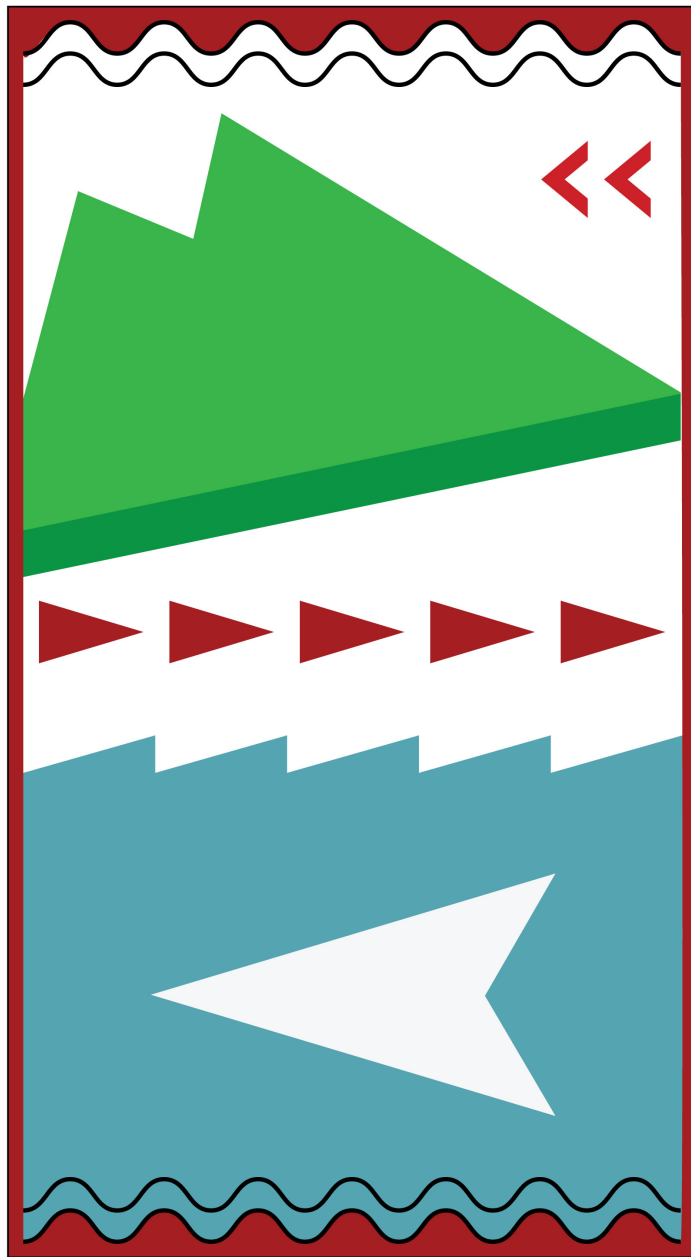
ABOUT THE WORK

The piece *Skw'enmáylh - Prayer* reflects several dominant patterns and design elements that are shared by both Islamic and Coast Salish weaving traditions. Inspired by a sense of curiosity developed by inter cultural interactions, the artists incorporated both a literal and metaphorical window, - or space of reflection - to allow for consideration of poignant questions that arose from this process. For instance, what do these common elements mean to other cultures? How are these symbols historically relevant and what are their origins? What do these symbols mean in a present context? These questions lead to important discussions about collective experiences, and how the past continues to affect the present.

This rug is primarily an image of a gateway to prayer, with the central element of the design representing the threshold to the divine, spiritual realm or heaven. Using a group of share symbols, based on inherent cultural laws and spiritual integrity, proposes a unity; it is an offering of place for the community to pray together in harmony. The gateway, existent in multiple cultures, shows foundationally how people are connected. This work reflects an opportunity to bring together two separate worlds of thought, while celebrating a sense of interconnectedness.

PROCESS

For Coast Salish weavers the process of weaving is inherently spiritual. The ancestors work through their descendants' hands and tools to create the works, while the weaver's role is to be an open vessel to carry the message and allow the meaning to come through. Angela George believes that you must leave your heart and mind open to what the weaving product will be; although this means that the process may lead the intention of the design to a very different place. These changes typically have very deep and significant meanings to the person who receives the work. George recognizes the need to relinquish control, thus allowing the final purpose of this creation to be a collaboration between herself and generations before her. For George and Nahanee, this design comes from a place of wanting to know, understand, and explore other spaces, cultures, and ways of being. The artists express a deep need to protect and preserve their culture, while also understanding the significance of creating opportunities for collaboration and sharing. This work provides this intention with the hope that it will continue to be passed down for generations and continue to carry this message.



Unbroken Prayer (Tellequah's Message)

Graphic Artist: Michelle Nahanee

Textile Artist: Chief Janice George and Buddy Joseph

Material: Woven sheep's wool

Dimensions: 57" x 22"

ABOUT THE WORK

The source of culture and spiritual identity begins with the land. The piece, *Unbroken Prayer*, reflects the human representation, connection, reliance, and responsibility to the land and water. These sources have sustained humanity for thousands of years, and this homage from the artists is a way to give thanks. They propose protection of Mother Earth for all she has provided, while also working through feelings of fear and pain for the accelerated harm on the environment due to years of human impact.

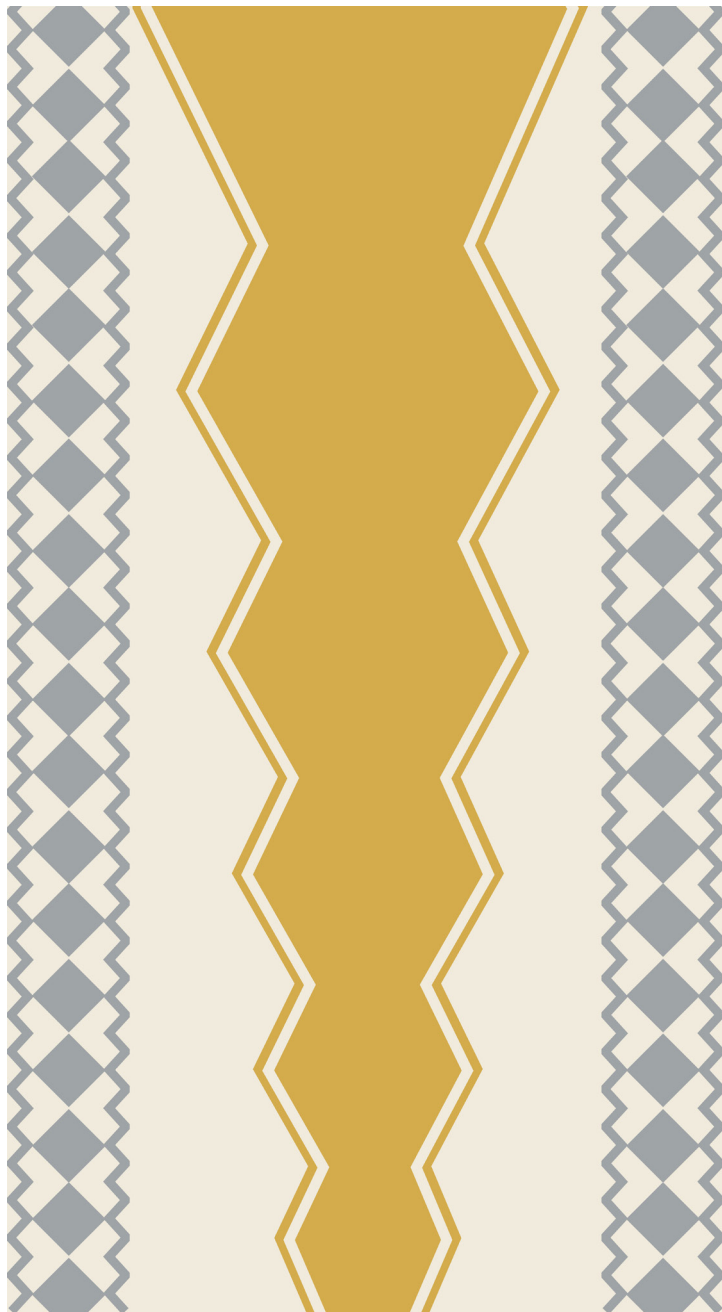
The artists have asked viewers to consider their role in the treatment of the land, the ocean, and nature, and to understand the lasting impact on generations to come. Praying for the next seven generations' wellbeing is a line of teaching shared by Chief Janice George and Buddy Joseph along with many elders before them. This weaving represents the ancestors that prayed for the land, this current generation, and for the future beyond them. The dominant red represents an unbroken prayer received from the ancestors, a continuation of thoughts and prayer to be passed along to the forthcoming generations. The artists dedicated this work after being deeply moved by the recent story of Tellequah, the endangered female orca, carrying her deceased calf for nearly three weeks during her period of grief. Pictured in the textile work is a raven and eagle standing in as the messengers between the spiritual and human world, carrying our messages of responsibility to Mother Earth and her creatures. While the textile work differs from the original design, the narrative expands yet remains the same; the weaving becomes one part of the larger story of prayer.

Ultimately, this piece becomes not only an extended offering of prayer, but also a reminder of our responsibilities to come together to nurture and guard our shared land.

PROCESS

Chief Janice George and Buddy Joseph identify that weaving is a foundation of their culture. Woven works are symbolically and functionally created for Wellness and are passed on to several generations to carry on cultural and ancestral legacies. Weavings are the foundations of ceremony, and are representative of a pure, marked space for ritual. They are subsequently wrapped around individuals for protection of spirit and energy. These wearers rely on weavings as an expressive reminder and aid to focus their mind, body, heart, and spirit.

Practices of spirituality and reference to land are integrally reflected in Coast Salish weaving. The materials of the work are dependent and connected to harvesting regions. By incorporating nature's symbols into these designs, it becomes a dedication to ancestral teachings. This work particularly implores viewers to think of human impacts and what we choose to leave behind. For the Skwxwú7mesh community, it is believe that once prayers are laid, they remain in place and in perpetuity to serve for several generations. In a time of increasing contamination, this weaving becomes an alternative remnant: it remains as a physical prayer, laid down on the earth, serving to provide positive energy and spiritual mindfulness.



What Does Your Path Look Like?

Graphic Artist: Doaa Jamal

Textile Artist: Krista Point

Material: Hand-spun woven sheep's wool

Dimensions: 54.5" x 23"

ABOUT THE WORK

What Does Your Path Look Like? is a platform for discussion, and demonstrates the process of collaboration both visually and conceptually. Artist Doaa Jamal was particularly interested in Krista Point's woven work given her ability to tell stories using symbols that are deeply rooted in Musqueam traditions. For Jamal, the ability to tell stories with images is a way to create powerful human Connection. Thus she created the beginning of narrative, using a minimalist and abstract design, and left an open space in the centre for Point to interpret and respond with her own reflections and graphics. The graphic design shows two paths to spirituality – both nonlinear so as to reflect changes and challenges that arise with life experiences. Despite this, the path moves upwards and outwards, similarly as individuals' perspectives might expand through life experiences. The rug is bordered with a pattern of diamonds, used in textiles globally with meanings that carry various significance. The central, connective space remains open in the design in order to weave in symbols that carry the history of the land and its ancestral beings; Point has incorporated several signature elements within this space and below. Together, these elements demonstrate how creative collaboration can create unique and meaningful works when artists express a willingness to share earnestly, learn new techniques and ways of thinking, while offering each other space for expression.

PROCESS

Krista Point's weaving and designs have been greatly influenced by traditional Coast Salish handcrafted works. Point directs energy to and echoes old stories from First Nations people, while transforming them into her own unique, contemporary design. In this way, her weavings help her stay connected to her community, and actively help share these traditions and teachings. As she weaves, Point pours her passion for work and her people, along with positive energy into all of her pieces. Her weavings are unique and tell their own story.



Find What You Need

Graphic Artist: Doaa Jamal

Textile Artist: Dawn Livera and Adrienne Neufeld

Material: Woven cotton warp and Canadian wool weft, with supplemental yarn from around the world

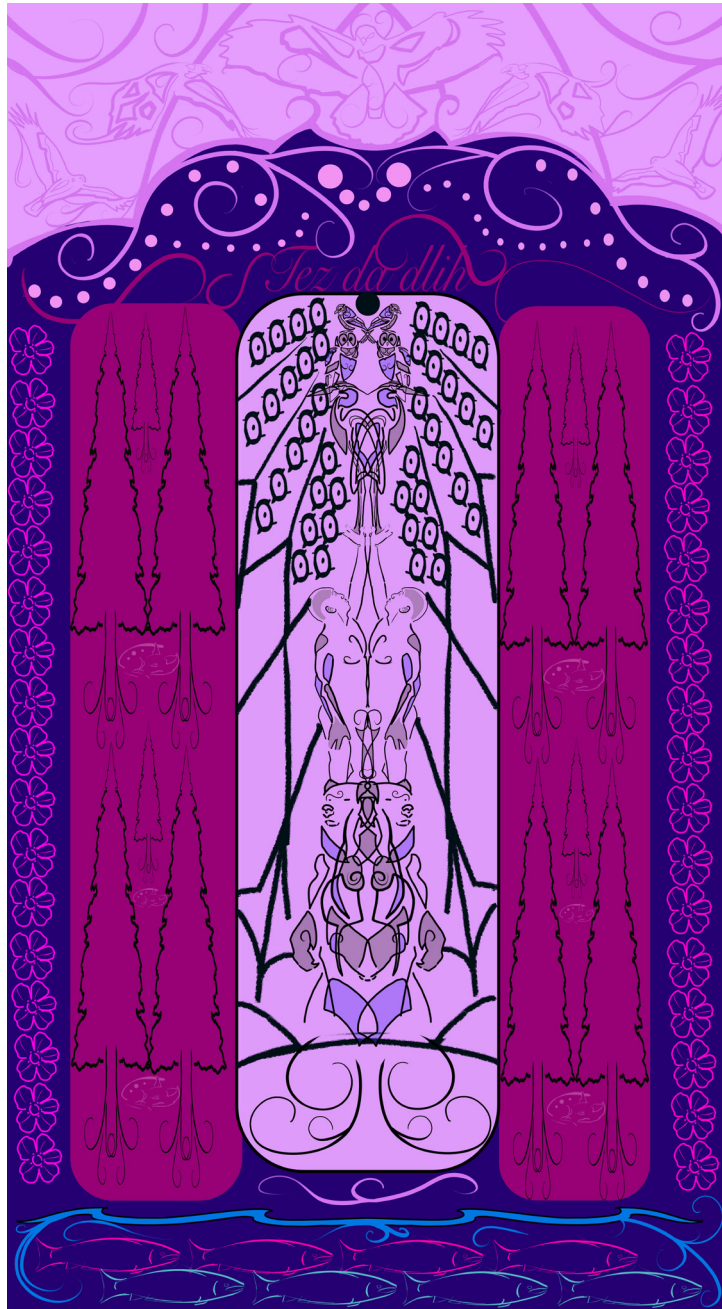
Dimensions: 46.5" x 21"

ABOUT THE WORK

Prayer rugs are cherished possessions. They are used to develop personal, intimate spaces and aid in instilling a sense of peace through prayer and reflection. Despite this motivating sentiment, sharing dialogue around distinct personal experiences of spirituality can sometimes lead to feelings of tension and anxiety. In order to navigate through these sensitive concerns, this collaborative team created a prayer rug inspired by the universal search for inner peace and spiritual balance. *Find What You Need* is an experiential rug that transports individuals to a recognizable and picturesque local landscape, reminding the viewer of the fortuitous experience of living in this surreal and humbling landscape. Inspired by themes of peace, the artists strategically used symbols and shapes to create a sense of balance and harmony. Keeping visual conflict to a minimum, elements such as colour, organic/geometric shapes and symmetry/asymmetry, work together in meaningful dialogue. As the viewer's eye travels along the work, or if the body is engaged for use in prayer, the individual is rewarded with a personalized experience through prana (life-force) chakras. This experience leads to the rug's focal point: a medicine wheel with the Arabic text that reads "mental", "spiritual", "emotional" and "physical". These four states, perfectly balanced, represent the Indigenous and globally recognized dimensions of wellness. Universal symbols are an ongoing interest for the artists: many similar shapes and designs that have existed in traditional weavings or architecture from very different parts of the world appear within this piece. While some shapes are simply decorative, others have symbolic meanings. The significance of shapes will vary from place to place, or person to person. The simultaneous concepts of diversity and similarity reflect the interconnectedness of cultures around the world, while encouraging unique individual interpretations that celebrate each viewer's personal background and learnings.

PROCESS

To expand on the notions of universality and global connection, Dawn Livera put out a call locally and around the world to ask for small samples of yarn and thread from her fibre arts networks. The pieces of yarn that came in include both commercial and hand-spun fibres from Scotland, India, Portugal, Turkey, Germany, Mexico, Guatemala, Estonia, Latvia, Finland, Iceland, Sri Lanka, and more. Notably, threads from prayer flags found on Austrian Alps, hand-spun wool from the Navajo Nation, and scraps of Harris Tweed fabric from Scotland were sent to her. Although the majority of *Find What You Need* is created with Canadian yarn, these short lengths of fibre from around the world also exist within the threads, their stories carried by the work.



The Other Side

Graphic Artist: Damian John

Textile Artist: Nadia Sajjad

Material: Paint, mirror, and embroidery threads on fabric

Dimensions: 45" x 23.5"

ABOUT THE WORK

The prayer rug, titled *The Other Side*, is a platform to explore and create a dialogue around spirituality, a sense of belonging, and identity. The artwork represents the experience of living two different cultures, specifically focusing on the backgrounds of the two artists. The work is meant to acknowledge and celebrate diversity through the harmonious integration of Canadian and Iranian graphic elements and techniques.

The design concept began with an exploration of iconography within both cultures. The artists had recognized the formal similarities between two significant, ceremonial structures for both First Nations and Islamic cultures: this form took shape as both totem poles (monumental carved tree trunks created by Indigenous groups from the Northwest Coast) and minarets (tall structural elements of mosques which traditionally host the call to prayer). Working with this towering profile, Damian John stylized various beings that were indicative of his familiar surroundings that also might typically appear in totems: humans, bears, fawns, birds, fish, plants and trees. By mirroring this image, the artist was also able to suggest the shape of a minaret. At the top of this design remains the Tl'azt'en words for "prayer", encircled by local wild roses as a nod towards the floral patterns bordered on typical, traditional Islamic prayer rugs.

PROCESS

With evident visual differences between the graphic design and finished textile, this particular collaboration demonstrates the depth of changes in the artistic collaborative process from exploration, to design, and final creation. After several exchanges, Damian John found that the best way to work on a multicultural graphic platform was to work in his own signature style, composed in a way he thought best represented the repetitive patterns typically seen in prayer rugs. In order to transfer this style onto the fabric using the very traditional block print style, textile artist Nadia Sajjad then interpreted the design further in a way that best suited the technique. In the end, by keeping John's graphic elements and the narrative developed with Sajjad, the piece arrived in a truly synergistic creative space that was new and exciting to both artists. The design and technique held personal connections to the artists. Sajjad chose to learn and incorporate a traditional Iranian printmaking technique called *qalamkar*. Historically, *qalamkar* was a technique done by hand using brush and paints, but due to present innovations, the use of wooden blocks for mass production are able to yield equally amazing patterns and colours. Sajjad decided to combine the two techniques using traditional fabric, as an homage to heritage and present lived contexts. The print is black and white to elaborate on the diaspora and the artist's complicated personal spiritual experiences, having been brought up under unstable political conditions in Iran. The mirrors in the piece, commonly found in Iranian textiles, reflect the powerful nostalgia of childhood memories, while the silver threads emphasize the desire for connection and reconciliation.



Dialogues of Spirit

Graphic Artist: Damian John
Textile Artist: Michelle Sirois Silver
Material: Hand-hooked wool on linen
Dimensions: 40.5" x 25.125"

ABOUT THE WORK

The conceptualization for *Dialogues of Spirit*, like many of the collaborations in the exhibition, began with a strong connection between two artists of vastly different experiences and backgrounds. When deliberating on a narrative, the artists connected on a desire to visualize a shared experience of spirituality and human interconnectedness, and to navigate these feelings through locally relevant and directly concerning dialogues around truth and reconciliation. This came with a unique set of challenges which ultimately steered the direction of the design: How does one share personal, vulnerable, and painful experiences with someone they are just beginning to know? How does one even begin the conversation?

A strong component of sharing is the concept of witnessing and being witnessed. Damian John's artistic work often showcases Spirit in the form of animals; in this particular design process, he felt a strong call towards the figure of the elk. The woodland creature stands purposefully in the foreground, appropriately wide-eyed with acute hearing. As one would kneel on the rug, the arms go towards the elk's long antlers – a direct point of strength and connection.

The artists took turns sharing personal experiences. In this particular collaboration, John and Michelle Sirois Silver connected over a recognized shared experience of lost languages. Both experienced a familial history where language was not passed down, and consequently have struggled with a feeling of a loss of knowledge and a void in understanding both heritage and identity. Text that incorporated these lost words, in addition to the language that connected the two artists, plays a revalent role in the design. The phrases "I see you" and "I hear you" came naturally in French, English, and Tl'azt'en Dene. This rug ultimately demonstrates how individuals coming from different spaces are able to communicate and share.

PROCESS

For Michelle Sirois Silver, the choice of materials, techniques and concepts are in perpetual conversation with one another. The artist uses a traditional technique to create contemporary work exploring the ways that the past influences the present, and the present helps to make sense of the past. Sirois Silver uses a visual language of symbols and meanings in her work to tell stories about identity, culture, and the changing world. Each body of work is a record of time and place, and ultimately becomes a form of expression and extension of self, a way of both healing and communicating.



Celebrating Knowledge and Belief: An Intercultural Dialogue

Graphic Artist: Sholeh Mahlouji

Textile Artist: Ruth Scheuing and Mary Lou Trinkwon

Material: Jacquard woven, cotton

Dimensions: 36.5" x 20.25"

ABOUT THE WORK

While it can be difficult to come across an agreement for a collective experience of what is sacred, the artists drew inspiration from the spirituality of nature. Upon studying images of trees and their use in textile traditions, they decided on a focused tree design directed upwards. By creating this skyward movement, the tree took on a familiar appearance to some traditional Islamic Prayer Rugs, while simultaneously creating an allegory for spiritual growth. Furthermore, specific trees emerged as significant to different cultures, from day-to-day use to their ceremonial function. This piece features a stylized Cypress, which in Iran is the most commonly used tree motif in textiles, patterns, and poetry. The Cedar tree, revered across Canada for its multipurpose uses since pre-contact times, is also part the Cypress family. In this way, nature remains both connecting and central to the conceptual groundwork of the design and remains a representation of a greater power. It was important for the artists to illustrate knowledge held in things of the past, whether it be nature, textiles, architecture, or mytho. The design became a way of incorporating all of these past learnings and newly gained experiences to create an entirely unique style and design. Graphic artist Sholeh Mahlouji sought similarities in design between her own cultural aesthetic, Mary Lou Trinkwon's 'Pioneers in Canada' textile series, and the influential brick and tile motifs that have been a main focus of recent investigation for Ruth Scheuing. This collaboration ultimately resulted in a different way of weaving, including single motif repeats and shifts, and hidden messages through patterns linking back to centuries of weaving history.

PROCESS

Celebrating Knowledge and Belief: An Intercultural Dialogue was hand woven on a Jacquard loom. The Jacquard loom was invented in 1804 by Joseph Marie Jacquard in France as a way to simplify complex weaving patterns. Today, the Jacquard loom is used with a digital interface as a way to further simplify the design process. While historically craft has had a challenged relationship with industrialization, the Jacquard looms give the user the ability to create complex patterns, which in turn allows for a refocus of artistic creativity to process over technique. With the Jacquard loom's limitation of colours, the artists were instead able to use different shades of gray to develop a layered, architectural effect that reflected patterns inspired by *Saljuq* brickwork patterns in Iran. The red element becomes the single most dominant colour, chosen for its association to sacred objects and spirituality. The red diamond shapes incidentally mimic kufic banai (the oldest Arabic script often seen on the architecture of mosques), but carries a subversive code in an abstracted weaving language called Name Drafting. As symbols also traditionally act as a memory aid, the artists purposely chose to code the phrase "Paradise Has Many Gates" as a subtle visual reminder for this sentiment as one lays their head down to pray.



Whose Needle (Can) Will Re-stitch the Earth to the Sky?

Graphic Artist: Sholeh Mahloui

Textile Artist: Shamina Senaratne

Material: Applique and hand stitching (European threads) on Indian cotton

Dimensions: 41" x 22"

ABOUT THE WORK

The collaboration that led to *Whose Needle (Can) Will Re-stitch the Earth to the Sky?* became a sincere venture into exploring settler experiences, and understanding how personal perceptions begin to change with time as individuals open themselves to new experiences. The project began with an exploration of nettle stems as the design focus. Although nettle stems grow all over the world, stinging nettles are recognizably an Indigenous plant that grows wild in the city of Vancouver. For textile artist Shamina Senaratne, who has lived in the Vancouver area for decades, rootedness included feeling at home, and familiarity with the natural environment, which includes a respect for all indigenous plants. Senaratne learned from visiting with Debra Sparrow that on the West Coast, nettle fibre from the plant's stems has been traditionally used by Coast Salish weavers for the unseen warp threads within their fine woven blankets and other weavings. Nettle fibre is used for its strength. Considering the warp as the structure on which weaving is created, Senaratne wished to use this plant as the starting point for their design it allowed for a way to think deeply about the land we inhabit; our cultural interactions with the land; respecting the land's history and its people. Using it symbolically, she wished to invoke strength and resilience as prayers embedded within the work. Graphic artist Sholeh Mahloui, who has only been in Canada for a few years, still holds very vivid memories and attachments to her home in Iran. To focus on stinging nettle, which in Iran is termed gazaneh and also refers to talk which is hurtful or upsetting, meant letting go of preconceived notions of what this plant means both physically and emotionally. Ultimately, the collaborators spent more time together to speak in depth about heritage, respect, and gratitude. This experience of sharing notions of home, community, identity, and land was an emotional process for the participants, but with time and discussion led to understanding and mutual respect. In this work, nettle becomes a powerful metaphor for acceptance and difference around perceptions of home and cultural identity. While nettle's needle-like hairs have the potential to cause surface pain, its leaves also have healing properties; its very fibre is strong. What are we capable of if we employ patience, time and a willingness to learn? In the final design the Tree of Life, which gathers the stories of generations on this land, incorporates the plant and the resilience of nature, in an image of rebirth, of regeneration, of return and "ever growing".

PROCESS

Textile artist Shamina Senaratne works intuitively with materials and themes to develop her visual narratives. For this collaboration, she has chosen to fuse fragments of fabric together as elements of storytelling. Materials have been chosen for their ephemeral appearance – a way of thinking about the ephemeral nature of life, culture, relationships – that are not be taken for granted, that need care, that can be fragile, that can be resilient. The cotton fabrics are light-weight but layered. Stitched together, they become strengthened. Hand stitching is about holding the material in your hands and guiding a needle through it with care. From design drawing to the cloth, the prayer rug became imbued with references to nettle, Douglas fir and salmon swimming upstream. At the same time as a tree of life brings our many stories of experience and home-making on this land together, she leaves gaps and spaces for the unknown stories of generations and individuals lost. The sawtooth and triangle forms that infuse the composition are directly inspired by the nettle leaf edge but relate to design elements in Persian and Salish textiles, as well as Indian Ralli quilts, becoming a cohesive element that connects these artist's backgrounds with the Indigenous community. The overall final design encompasses central themes of nature, growth, time, generational experience, resilience, and persistence.

The Artists

Debra Sparrow

Debra Sparrow has been deeply involved with the revival of Musqueam weaving for over 30 years, and has many years of study, trial, and learning directly from the work of her ancestors. Her work has been collected and exhibited nationally and internationally including The University of British Columbia, The Canadian Museum of History (previously Civilization), The Royal BC Museum, The Vancouver International Airport (YVR Collections), the Burke Museum (Seattle), and the Smithsonian. She was the recipient of the BC Creative Achievement Award for First Nations Art in 2008. Most recently, she participated in “The Fabric of Our Land: Salish Weaving” at the Museum of Anthropology both as an exhibitor and as a regular, active weaving demonstrator using a traditional loom from the museum collection. In addition to her weaving, education has been of equal value to Debra Sparrow. Recognizing weaving has the ability to offer stories of our heritage, it also serves as a traditional form of education to effectively teach us of math, science, history, and philosophy. It has been important for Sparrow to pass on the Salish weaving practice and Musqueam history to the future generations, which led to her involvement in the co-creation of the Musqueam Museum School with the University of British Columbia. In addition to teaching classes, she also shares her knowledge through public speaking, presentations, and publications (including UNESCO, 2001).

Robyn Sparrow

Robyn Sparrow was born and raised in the Musqueam Nation; she is a self-taught Master Weaver. At an early age, Sparrow felt a need to find out who she was spiritually, who her ancestors were, and the history of her people. She decided to follow the path of arts and textiles and found herself inspired to learn and carry on the tradition of Coast Salish weaving. Robyn Sparrow and her two sisters, Debra Sparrow and Wendy Grant, revived the art of weaving in 1980 by speaking to their elders and researching; they continue to work together and independently. The artist and her sisters have formed a group of Musqueam weavers

and pass on their traditions and knowledge to future generations. This path she continues down helps her express herself as a First Nation's woman through weaving and art. Sparrow strives to push the boundaries of traditional Coast Salish weaving while staying in the realm of understanding. Sparrow's work has been and continues to be exhibited across British Columbia in a number of venues, shows, and public projects.

Michelle Nahanee

Michelle Nahanee is a critical Indigenous scholar with 20+ years of professional experience in graphic design and communications. She melds technology and tradition to change opinions, build relationships and increase understanding. Her clients are First Nations, NGOs, corporations and government departments. She is a Squamish Nation member from the village of Eslhá7an. Michelle Nahanee recently completed a Master of Arts in Communication from Simon Fraser University where she wrote “Decolonizing Identity: Indian Girl to Sk̓wxwú7mesh Matriarch.” She concluded her research with a call to dismantle academic barriers to decolonizing practices. She is also the designer of a life-size board game and workshop called Sinulhkay and Ladders that promotes the Squamish practice of Chen chen stway (holding each other up) while working through neocolonial scenarios of oppression.

Angela George

Angela George carries two ancestral names, sits'sáts'tenat and q'wənat. Her late mother is slatwx, Cookie Thomas (Cole/Discon/Billy family) from Sk̓wxwú7mesh and her father is from the Baker family from Sk̓wxwú7mesh and the Jones and Peter family on Vancouver Island. She was raised by her late Dad, wika, Alexander Paul of Sts'ailes in the Fraser Valley. Angela George is married to Gabriel George, grandson of late Chief Dan George and lives and works in the Tsleil-Waututh Nation in North Vancouver. This Coast Salish mother of four has dedicated her career to the betterment of First Nations people and communities. Traditionally groomed, she has a

strong understanding of her culture, spiritual teachings and the impacts of colonization and barriers that plague First Nations communities. She has a passion for traditional canoe racing, weaving and cultural singing and dancing and believes that practicing traditions and having a strong sense of identity and connection to our ancestors is vital to community wellness, development and sustainability. Angela George is currently working on her EMBA in Indigenous Business Leadership at SFU. Angela George is humbled by the gift of traditional weaving, holding this connection to her late mother and Squamish ancestry dearly. She loves to learn and teach weaving and strives to carry this sacred practice with the utmost integrity.

Chief Janice George and Buddy Joseph

Chepximiya Siyam' Janice George and Skwetsimeltxw Willard 'Buddy' Joseph are accomplished weavers and teachers from the Squamish Nation. They have co-founded L'hen Awtxw Weaving House to share the teachings and practice of traditional Coast Salish wool weaving. Chief Janice George graduated from Capilano University, North Vancouver BC, and the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, NM, USA. She feels her education at these schools helped her excel as a teacher, adding to her most important traditional teachings. She is a hereditary chief, trained museum curator and educator. George also co-organized the 1st Canada Northwest Coast Weavers Gathering with other Squamish Nation Weavers. George and Joseph are from prominent Squamish families and have numerous ceremonial and cultural responsibilities in their community. Joseph is the former director of the Squamish Housing and Capital Projects and currently consults on capital projects for First Nations communities.

Doaa Jamal

Doaa Jamal is a freelance graphic designer and photographer. Her professional expertise lies in creating dynamic visuals for individuals and organizations eager to understand their identity through the power of colour, shape, and symbolism. Through the scope of her lens she captures small moments in time to create big expressions of personality. Each of her photographic portraits are a welcome window for endless stories and emotion. Between projects (which includes working with the Vancouver Biennale, Vancouver Mural Festival, and Voices of Muslim Women), Doaa Jamal experiments with Arabic calligraphy and type; mixed media fabrication; and travel photography, all from her point of practice in Vancouver, BC.

Krista Point

Krista Point is a Coast Salish Weaver of the Musqueam Nation. In over thirty years of weaving, Krista's work has been displayed at exhibitions with Susan A. Point (renown Coast Salish Artist) and in places such as Thunder Bay Art Gallery (1989); Montreal (April to May 1989), and Switzerland. Notably, her work has been on display at the YVR Airport, Smithsonian Museum, Museum of Anthropology (University of British Columbia), CBC, and the Bill Reid Foundation. Local showcases include the Planetarium, Expo Site '86, the P.N.E., and several local secondary schools. Krista has also taught at the Musqueam Adult Learning Centre, where students learn to split, spin, and dye wool as well as weave.

Dawn Livera and Adrienne Neufeld

Dawn Livera is a textile and mixed media artist who believes that “there are no mistakes”. She was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, spent her childhood in London, England and her adolescence in Kelowna, BC, Canada. She has lived in Vancouver, Canada her whole adult life. Dawn Livera believes that making art should not be the private domain of the “talented” or “learned” few. Rather, everyone should feel free to explore their own creativity without worrying about whether their art is “good enough”. Adrienne Neufeld is a visual artist and high school student. At 17, she is already an accomplished weaver, sculptor and textile designer. Adrienne Neufeld was born in Vancouver and has lived her whole life in the same house, but she has a global legacy. Her mother, Dawn Livera, was born in Sri Lanka and lived in the UK before coming to Canada. Her father, like Neufeld, was born in Vancouver, but his parents were born in Eastern Europe and lived in South America before arriving in Canada. Adrienne Neufeld has a particular interest in religious art beyond the confines of her Mennonite and Catholic family background.

Damian John

Self-taught digital and acrylic painter with a lifelong penchant for creating, Damian John has been working at his art as a career since 2012, and has been a full time artist since 2014. John has studied in universities, forests, deserts, and on lake shores with wise people from a small part of the vast variety of wisdom traditions of the world. Part of his current paradigm is a deep need to strive for a kinder and more curious world. With a love for all that he is ethnically, a Tl'azt'en German Irish Austrian Hungarian Canadian, he strives to create a space in which we can truly see one another better.

Nadia Sajjad

Living and moving between the East and the West, Nadia Sajjad is interested in the notion of identity and categorization among different social structures. She experiments with different media such as ceramic, printmaking, fabric art and multimedia installation to depict the complication of identity through the notion of misplacement and social ranking. Sajjad has a background in carpet design and graduated from Emily Carr University of Art and Design. She was one of the Emily Carr Award recipients in 2013. She has recently focused on exploring cultural identity and belonging through collaborating with artisans with diverse Backgrounds.

Michelle Sirois Silver

Michelle Sirois Silver was born on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River and spent her formative years on Vancouver Island. She grew up in a home where making things was the norm. She worked in educational broadcast for over a decade and has been making hand hooked rugs for more than twenty years. Sirois Silver is a self-taught artist who has studied with Canadian hand hooking artists Barb Kennedy, Ann Taylor, and Anne Boissonot, as well as fiber artists Dorothy Caldwell and Jason Pollen. She exhibits internationally, teaches, and writes and speaks about her art practice. Sirois Silver works from her studio in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Sholeh Mahlouji

Sholeh Mahlouji is a Vancouver based graphic designer and illustrator who is passionate about sharing insights about Persian Art with her audience. Inspired by Persian art and architecture, she integrates motifs, symbols, and cultural icons to create artworks using digital and hand drawn techniques. Mahlouji holds a Bachelor of Graphic Design, as well

as a Master of Illustration from the University of Tehran. She has collaborated with diverse cultural and educational organizations such as the Children's Book Council of Iran and the Ministry of Education. Following her passion, Sholeh Mahlouji documents cultural elements in tiles, textiles, paintings, calligraphy, weavings, and architecture while traveling in Iran. Previously, she has run workshops on designing arts education curriculum based on Persian traditional art. She is currently studying for a Master of Arts in Art Education at the University of British Columbia.

Ruth Scheuing and Mary Lou Trinkwon

As an artist, educator and writer, Ruth Scheuing explores how artists communicate through textile patterns, language and stories. Relationships between nature and technologies, via computer assisted Jacquard weaving, Cyborgs and GPS tracking, represent some of her main current interests. Mary Lou Trinkwon's interest in making textile art extends across disciplines, combining both weaving and surface design, into research and studio exploration. Her creative process revolves around concepts of nostalgia as a historical specter of culture and identity. Scheuing and Trinkwon currently operate TAD (Textile Arts Department) both teaching and conducting projects using an AVL Jacquard loom at Makerlabs in Strathcona Vancouver. Both artists taught in the Textile Arts Program at Capilano University (Scheuing from 1992-2015 and Trinkwon in 2000-2015), have been exhibited across BC, and are recipients of the Vancouver Mayor's Crafts Award.

Shamina Senaratne

Shamina Senaratne's textile art explores how we witness and narrate our world; how we thread fragments of story together, edit, and revise, to create meaning and coherence. She is interested in intercultural interaction and questions of identity, self, other and community. Many of her works have been about bringing forward hidden voices and unseen stories, and about ruptures and repairs. An interdisciplinary artist, Senaratne's textile-based contemporary art has been shown in curated and juried exhibitions in Canada, the US and Europe. She has also written and published poetry and short fiction. Senaratne has worked as an educator in museums and holds a degree in Communications, Publishing and History with a Certificate in Public History (SFU).

Zarina Laalo

Zarina Laalo is an independent curator and writer based in Ottawa, Ontario. Laalo was previously the Vancouver Biennale's Curator of Ancillary Projects and Coordinator of International Residencies, responsible for much of the organization's public programming and community outreach. Prior to working in Vancouver, she has mostly worked with Canadian artists in commercial galleries and with public collections within various federal and academic institutions; some of these include Library and Archives Canada, the Canadian Museum of History, the University of Toronto, and the Portrait Gallery of Canada. Laalo holds a Masters of Arts in Art History from the University of Toronto and a Bachelors of Fine Arts from the University of Ottawa.

Workshops

Weaving Cultural Identities brought together several artists in a series of research workshops in June 2018. Together these artists heard from Indigenous and Islamic communities, and learned from each other about Vancouver's diversity by sharing their stories, cultures, and personal experiences.

These workshops took place in several locations including Museum of Vancouver, Al-Salaam mosque, and the Musqueam Culture Centre.



Photo Credit: Roaming The Planet



Photo Credit: Roaming The Planet



Photo Credit: Roaming The Planet



Photo Credit: Natalia Lebedinskaia



Photo Credit: Roaming The Planet

Community Engagement

The *Weaving Cultural Identities* exhibition was featured at the Museum of Vancouver from September 23rd to September 26th, 2018. During this time, hundreds of visitors engaged with the exhibition and participated in several events including artist tours, discussion panels, and demonstrations with schools groups. The events that took place for the duration of the exhibition covered a wide range of topics: from developing platforms for reconciliation, to discussing evolving art practices within the global textile communities.



Photo Credit: Zarina Laalo



Photo Credit: Roaming The Planet



Photo Credit: Roaming The Planet



Photo Credit: Zarina Laalo



Photo Credit: Roaming The Planet

Paradise Has Many Gates

This project is part of the 2018-2020 Vancouver Biennale exhibition themed “re-IMAGE-n”, and works in congruence with the installation piece *Paradise Has Many Gates* by Saudi Arabian artist Ajlan Gharem. Gharem’s piece is situated in Vanier Park and scheduled to be part of the Vancouver Biennale from June 2018 until the end of 2020. The installation is a chain-link structure that takes the form of a mosque; it challenges cultural barriers and our perception of communal spaces. Since its installation, the works serves as a gathering space for community dialogues, creative workshops, and other unique ways of sharing cultural histories.

In a world of mass migration and refugee crises, this artwork invites us to think about the role of fences as physical and psychological deterrents that can isolate and divide people and ideas. This structure, located in one of the most multicultural cities in the world, invites Muslim and non-Muslim alike to see through what traditionally divides us while offering opportunity for creating experiences that will unite us.



Photo Credit: Roaming The Planet



Photo Credit: Ajlan Gharem

Next Steps

Weaving Cultural Identities is part of the dialogue inspired by Gharem’s work. A second phase of the project to be presented in June 2019 will bring together First Nations artists from Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh to develop a large prayer rug to fill *Paradise Has Many Gates*, as acknowledgment of the history, of the land, its peoples, connections, and relations; a symbol of the intercultural relations of the present.

The textile works in this exhibition are made available for acquisition, with the proceeds given to participating artists and to help fund this second phase of this project.



Photo Credit: Roaming The Planet



Photo Credit: Roaming The Planet



Photo Credit: Alia Youssef: The Sisters Project

Special Thanks

ARTISTS

Adrienne Neufeld, Ajlan Gharem, Angela George, Buddy Joseph, Damian John, Dawn Livera, Debra Sparrow, Doaa Jamal, Chief Janice George, Kit Walton, Krista Point, Mary Lou Trinkwon, Michelle Nahanee, Michelle Sirois Silver, Nadia Sajjad, Robyn Sparrow, Ruth Scheuing, Shamina Senaratne, Sholeh Mahlouji.

PARTNERS

Museum of Vancouver, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, Centre for Comparative Muslim Studies.

WORKSHOPS, RESEARCH AND EVENTS

Musqueam Cultural Centre, Al-Salaam Mosque (Sharif Senbel and Daud Ismail), Green Room Edmonton (Omar Yaqub, Noor Iqbal, Kit Walton), Aslam Bulbulia, Abeer Yusuf.

SPONSORS AND IN-KIND CONTRIBUTORS

Canada Council for the Arts, Buschlen Mowatt Nichols Foundation, Heritage BC, Government of Canada, Gearbase Vancouver

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Barrie Mowatt (Artistic Director), Marty Hasselbach (CEO), Zarina Laalo (Curator of Ancillary Projects), Natalia Lebedinskaia (Director of Public Projects), Leigh-Anne Niehaus (Administrator/Program Coordinator), Naomi Evans (BIG IDEAS Coordinator), Niki Dun (Social Media Coordinator), Linda Purcell (Fundraising Manager), Greg Dale (Fabricator)

MUSEUM OF VANCOUVER STAFF

Mauro Vascera (CEO), Mike Mallen (Director of Operations), Viviane Gosselin (Director of Collections and Exhibitions), Wendy Nichols (Curator of Collections), Sharon Fortney (Curator of Indigenous Collections and Engagement), Brendan Brooks (Rental Coordinator), Josh Doherty (Fabrication Manager)

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Roaming The Planet, Alia Youssef, Ajlan Gharem, Zarina Laalo, Natalia Lebedinskaia

Catalogue created by Doaa Jamal

About the Biennale

The Vancouver Biennale is a non-profit charitable organization that exhibits great art in public space, creating a catalyst for learning, community engagement, dialogue, and social action. Our mission is to make Public Art accessible, engaging, and motivating to create vibrant and inspired communities.

Our exhibitions feature sculpture, new media, film, music and performance. The Vancouver Biennale transforms the urban landscape into an Open Air Museum, creating unexpected and globally inspired cultural experiences where people live, play, work and transit. Each exhibition fosters creatively inspired communities, and installations become a social bridge for people of all ages, cultural backgrounds, educational levels and financial wherewithal to come together as neighbours to explore, learn, dialogue and imagine.



Photo Credit: Ajan Gharem

2018-2020 Exhibition Theme: “re-IMAGE-n”

The Vancouver Biennale introduces its fourth edition, titled “re-IMAGE-n”, launched June 2018, with projects unfolding over the exhibition’s two-year duration. The Biennale invites international artists to respond to the prevailing issues of our time, including the widespread refugee and migrant crisis, a global shift towards nationalism and isolationism, and an intensifying drain on our shared natural resources. Projects “re-IMAGE-n” (reimagine) a progressive social

framework that supports free speech, Reconciliation and the rights of First Nations, LGBTQ rights, artistic freedom, gender, racial and sexual equality, ecological awareness, religious freedom, and the ethics of biotechnology.

The Biennale’s artworks evolve in freely accessible and often unexpected public locations throughout Vancouver. By bringing diverse audiences together with artists who offer a multiplicity of perspectives, aesthetics, lived realities and cultural histories, the 2018-2020 Vancouver Biennale provides evolving opportunities to reimagine the agency and impact of art in public space.