

Collections Agency

July 6 - August 27, 2022

C2 Centre for Craft

1-329 Cumberland Avenue

Winnipeg, Manitoba

(204) 615-3951

www.c2centreforcrafter.ca

Opening Reception

July 6 | 7PM - 9PM

Gallery Hours

Wed. - Sat.
12PM - 4PM

Artists

Adriana Alarcón
Jessie Jannuska
Naila Janzen

Jocelyn Piirainen
Lin Xu

Curated by

Jenny Western

Allison Yearwood





The *Collections Agency* exhibit is one small step in MCML's path towards reconciliation and decolonizing. This exhibit is not the end point by any means. Thinking actively about how our collection reflects or does not reflect all Manitobans is essential, but not enough. Taking action to ensure that we represent multiple perspectives through our collection and our activities was not always our past, but it is now our present and our future. No longer can the Euro-Canadian view of history be the only way to represent craft in Manitoba. No longer can we feel satisfied with one viewpoint being dominant. No longer can one history be the priority.

Although all art forms can connect people across culture, language, time, geography and history, craft is so universal. All humans across the globe have their own local craft traditions, motifs and techniques, which are informed by local materials, environment, societal necessity and the reality of daily life in their communities. Appreciating craft is not as daunting to many viewers as it is for other forms of art, because craft is still part of daily life for many people. Familiarity allows people to engage more freely and to relate to the work of others, even if it is quite different. This exhibit showcases how five artists took their experience with craft, engaged freely with the MCML collection, and created new pieces that respond to our collective craft history.

The statements they are making through this exhibit help us to reflect upon how things were, but more importantly how things can be and should be going forward.

It has been a rewarding to explore the issues of diversity, race, culture and representation through craft, with Jenny Western and Allison Yearwood as exhibit curators, and with the five artists who have created such thoughtful and original pieces.

On behalf of the Manitoba Crafts Museum and Library, I am honoured to recognize the financial support of the Manitoba Arts Council, the Winnipeg Arts Council and the Assiniboine Credit Union.

Andrea Reichert
Manitoba Craft Museum and Library Curator



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Museum collections are made up of objects that tell a story about our society and culture, but how these stories are told often depends upon who has access to those objects in the first place. The Manitoba Crafts Museum and Library (MCML) recognizes a failing within their organization in regards to works made by racialized peoples and in the museum's role as a gatekeeper of those objects. In an initial step on the road toward reconciliation, "Collections Agency" exhibits commissioned work by makers Adriana Alarcón, Jessie Jannuska, Naila Janzen, n Piirainen, and Lin Xu created in response to objects held within the museum's trust. In this case, the title of "Collections Agency" is meant as one invoking the spirit of revisiting, reclaiming, and rematriating cultural objects and craft concepts from museums and gatekeepers though the active agency of a collective group of creative makers. In the selection process of thinking about who should interrogate the question of what the gallery has and has not held as well as who has and has not had access to it, the response began to come from feminine voices. It is often women who rise to the surface after pain or crisis, being the ones who 'stitch' back up the fabric of family, community, and overall society. As such this assemblage of crafters, artists, and makers pulls together many distinct threads from unique identities, communities, and backgrounds into a pastiche of creative and critical craft-based work.



Hailing from Guatemala, Adriana Alarcón is a proud Latine, cisgender, queer artist living with disability on Treaty 1 territory. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree focusing on Cultural Studies with current creative interests spanning everything from graphic design to fine craftwork. For “Collections Agency” Alarcón chose to respond to a doily from the MCML collection. The delicacy of the piece was transcended by a sense of the strength in the complexity of lace making.



Knitted Doily | 3092.00

Alarcón saw it as a ‘map of triumphs’. The creation of her original piece was not easy; reading the pattern was a challenge, interpreting the stitch legend was a challenge, working with the unruly yarn was a challenge, and persevering with the scale of the project was a challenge. Alarcón chose to make her doily six times the size of the doily from the MCML collection that inspired it.

She also chose to eschew the customary white or cream doily colour for a deep red coloured yarn, leading her to title her piece “Sangre” or “blood” in Spanish. There is a corporeal element linking Alarcón’s work to blood and to the workings of the body. Alarcón’s piece can be viewed as being washed in her blood. There is a violence of ‘rewashing’ the history of pain and erasure associated with this colour while her chosen scale of the piece can be a re-envisioning of her positioning.

As she states, “With the body, sometimes one only sees the outside. There are no indicators to disability or otherness unless you look closely.” In much the same way Alarcón’s doily has intricacies that are not immediately apparent to the casual viewer. Alarcón’s work points to a need for cultural decoding within the craft and museum context.

Jessie Jannuska is a Winnipeg-based interdisciplinary visual artist from the Canupawakpa Dakota First Nation with mixed Dakota, Ojibway and European ancestry. While she practices working in a variety of media it is her beadwork that that is presented in “Collections Agency”. Jannuska was drawn to a series of beaded Dakota bags held within the MCML collection. Her response was the creation of a fringed bag beaded with the image of a woman’s face and emblazoned with the words “Land Back”. The woman represented here is Indigenous rights advocate Autumn Pelletier. Pelletier was named Chief Water Commissioner for the Anishinabek Nation in 2019. In Indigenous cultures women are recognized as being the “water carriers”.



For Jannuska to pair this take on environmental stewardship with handbags is a clever reflection on Indigenous feminine strength. Jannuska’s bag maintains a unfinished quality which she explains as “a reference to the cathartic process of making this work and regaining control.”



Carrying Bag | 529.00



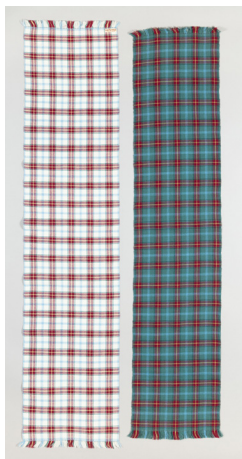
Women's purses, which may seem to be merely an accessory of fashion and style, in truth compose a toolkit of women's preparedness and caregiving. There is a way of seeing handbags as socially sacred, as if we are not allowed to go into a woman's bag. We all know that we cannot go into a woman's bag but we are always fascinated with what comes out of the bag. Women are the water carriers but they are also the carriers of bundles that care for themselves, their families, their communities, and their environments. Through Jannuska's craft work, a beautifully articulated beaded bag is highlighted as symbol of strength, power, mystique, and resiliency.



Born in Jamaica, Naila Janzen grew up in Florida before moving to Manitoba. She is a skilled craftsperson and textile artist whose work focuses mainly on quilt-making, cushions, and cushion covers. In researching the MCML collection Janzen became interested in the story of the Manitoba Tartan. A tartan is a woven cloth in a strict geometric pattern whose selection and intersection of colours is representative of a place and its people. Clan and regional tartans are common, and most of the provinces in Canada have one despite the tartan's Scottish origins. Manitoba's colonial settlement by the Scottish Lord Selkirk was the inspiration for the design of the Manitoba Tartan in 1958. The colours and squares of the Manitoba Tartan take on a symbolic meaning, including the dark green lines which are said to represent "the men and women of many races who have enriched the life and history of Manitoba".

But to Janzen what is actually revealed is “the stratification of people and lack of equity in Manitoba.”

As she explains, “Whatever doesn’t represent all of us equitably, cannot represent Our Manitoba.” Janzen set about to create her own textile piece inspired by Manitoba, a quilt representing the Aurora Borealis as it is visible in our province. The colours of these Northern Lights is produced by the combination of different types of gasses and solar wind. As Janzen states, “It is this coming-together of difference that creates it’s beauty. Each layer of gas produces it’s own unique colour, and it is valued. There is no assimilation.” Photo by Leif Norman Janzen’s quilt offers a view of Manitoba that flows with colour, authenticity, representation, and unity.



Tartan Scarves | 189.00 & 190.00

An initial reaction to Janzen’s piece is that of pure joy. It harkens to the bright, lush colours of the Bantu, batik, and Kente cloths that are so common in African communities or even to the incredible quilts of Gee’s Bend, Alabama. Her piece is a redux of the potential of having a textile represent a community or culture. Her selection of a naturally occurring phenomenon speaks to accessibility, something that offers all of us our own relationship with the natural environment.



Jocelyn Piirainen is an urban Inuk originally from Ikalukutiak, Nunavut who balances a curatorial practice with an artistic practice of analog photography, filmmaking, beading, and crochet. The MCML's vast collection of doilies caught her attention, in particular a piece with the word "pain" crocheted into it. Piirainen wondered why someone would crochet this harsh word into their delicate craft piece until she realized that it was the French word for "bread" and was likely used to hold baking. Language, translation, humour, and craft all collided for Piirainen as she contemplated one of her Inuit ancestors taking on such a doily project, possibly with a hand-carved ivory crochet hook and hand-spun qiviut wool made from the underfur of the musk ox. Using this reimagining as her starting point, Piirainen crocheted an Inuinnaqtun equivalent of the modern motivational phrase "Live, Love, Laugh": "Inuuhiraaluuk! Iglagturaaluuk! Piqpagiyaraaluuk!" The "Piqpagiyaraaluuk" panel is crochet with qiviut wool while the "Iglagturaaluuk" panel used arctic fox blend wool and the "Inuuhiraaluuk" panel uses arctic

hare blend wool. The result is a beautifully articulated (and funny) take on the translation of traditional handicrafts into Indigenous futurisms. Humour and kitsch are often embedded in racialized communities. Including an 'easter egg' in a piece allows our communities a laugh while others may not get the joke. The reclamation of seeing racialized women as also able to have that kitsch from the dominant culture, but it being upgraded, is so transformative. Holding up the comedy that folks don't attribute to radicalized communities is a strategy of laughing through our pain.



"Pain" Bread Cloth | 3298.00

Lin Xu was born in Inner Mongolia, China and now lives in Brandon, Manitoba where she is an Associate Professor in Visual Arts at Brandon University specializing in ceramics. Brandon has become her second home and the vast prairie landscape surrounding the small city is a fascination to her. When it came time to look through the MCML collection it was a hooked rug from the mid-twentieth century that she wanted to work with. The rug represented a variety of wildflowers: Vetch, Iris, Columbine, Lady Slipper, Tiger Lily, etc. Although meant to demonstrate the local flora, Xu recognized wildflowers from where she grew up in China. Using locally collected clay sourced from the Geology department at Brandon University, Xu created a 40" x 30" floor-based installation mimicking the rug's structure.





Rug Hooked Wall Hanging | 70.00

Despite the vastly different materials used in the rug and in Xu's ceramic piece, the similarity of colours and textures produced between the two are striking. Xu's love of the natural world and use of natural elements comes through. She states, "Creating objects by hand keeps me grounded; it allows me to share my thoughts through the basic visual elements of our world even if we speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds."

The intricate work, the delicacy, and the obvious femininity of the final product almost feel like a cumulative piece. The method, and the fact that it feels as if her piece speaks to genetics, genome, and phrenology almost, those outdated sciences that were applied to equity-seeking groups. Having her beautiful replications in this piece feels like an act of polite disobedience.

“Collections Agency” addresses the way that the stories of our cultures and communities continue to be told through collected objects and craftwork. This dialogue on race and craft is long overdue for the MCML and for Manitoba. The exhibition is an artist-led, self-determined, and critical look at the presence and absence of diverse creators and their craftwork within this long-held collection. As curators, we want to invite the idea that this is a fine craft which is traditionally applied to racialized groups. But when looking at apexes of power that the gallery upholds this is revolutionary because craft may be the cousin of fine art but this feels like how the fine art rebellion starts.

This exhibition is by no means an exhaustive overview of racialized response to a craft museum’s collection and it is not supposed to be. What it is meant to be is a collective of five contemporary craft makers and artists standing in their power. These makers had a broad range of objects to choose from and the freedom to make their choice of what to work with and how to respond to it. They don’t represent a culture as a monolith. Rather, they represent themselves and the culture that they carry within them which is unique, rich, and nuanced. It is not something that is easily catalogued. It has agency, it has momentum, and the change that it wields is just getting started.

Adriana Alarcón

Adriana Alarcón is an artist living on Treaty I territory. A first-generation immigrant from Guatemala of complex identities, Alarcón is Latine, cisgender, queer and living with disability. As a Mestiza woman, she recognizes Maya K'ekchi' and her Spanish ancestry (though no direct claim to Indigenous community). These identities guide her work to explore coexisting contradictions in everyday life.

Alarcón incorporates cultural craft traditions and ancestral knowledge with contemporary narratives using fibre-based crafts, such as knitting, crochet, embroidery, beading and weaving. She has a bachelor's degree from York University in Cultural Studies. Alarcón combined her art practice with arts administration in Toronto and Winnipeg working at artist-run centres such as A Space, CARFAC Ontario, Craft Action TO and MAWA.

Jessie Jannuska

Jessie Jannuska is a Winnipeg-based interdisciplinary visual artist with mixed Dakota, Ojibway and European ancestry. She is from Canupawakpa Dakota First Nation. She has recently completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with honors from Brandon University. She primarily works in oil, acrylic, watercolor, pencil, pen, mixed media, and beading. She has had solo exhibitions at the Glen P. Sutherland Gallery, the Arts Mosaic Gallery, a billboard with the AGSM, and has participated in many group exhibitions. Her work can be found in the Provincial Art Collection of Manitoba. Jannuska teaches freelance art workshops in beading, dreamcatchers, painting and drawing across Manitoba. Jannuska's most prominent awards/grants are from the Manitoba Arts Council with the Indigenous 360-Learn Grant in 2019, Arts Smarts II grant in 2018 and the Student Bursary Award in 2016.

Naila Janzen

Naila Janzen started Rox Creative as a means to cope with waiting. Naila was waiting on healing, rediscovery, and new beginnings. During recovery from cancer treatments she decided to give quilting a second try. She needed a long-slow project to give her time purpose as she healed. When she was ready to get back to the normalcy of life she found herself pulled back to quilting, which had become the space that she found her flow and her voice. With the encouragement of friends and family she participated in her first joint show at a small Wpg gallery, Flatlanders Studio. One door led to another door, and Rox Creative was born. Rox has participated in the local modern market scene since 2018. She joined Simons' Canadian artisan sector, Fabrique 1840 in 2019. Deeply tied to her core values, Rox is exploring ways to communicating her values through her work; such as inclusion, reconciliation, community and love.

Jocelyn Piirainen

Jocelyn Piirainen is an urban Inuk, originally from Iqalukuttiaq (Cambridge Bay), NU, and currently working as the Assistant Curator of Inuit Art at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Graduating from Carleton University, her educational background has primarily focused on the arts, particularly film and new media. When not working as a curator, her current artistic practice primarily involves analog photography and film — mostly experimenting with Polaroids and Super 8 film — as well as honing her crochet and beading skills. She has contributed to publications such as Canadian Art, Canadian Geographic and the Inuit Art Quarterly.

Lin Xu

Lin Xu is a Chinese Canadian artist working with clay. She came to Canada in 2004 when she was offered a position at Brandon University to establish the ceramics program within the new Visual and Aboriginal Art program. Lin holds a master's in Fine Arts from Washington State University, a bachelor's in Visual Arts from the University of Sydney, Australia, and a bachelor's in Science (Engineering) from Jilin University, China. Lin's works have been shown both in Canada and internationally including the US, Hong Kong, Spain, France, Japan, and China. She was awarded several Visual Arts grant from Canada Council for the Arts and Manitoba Arts Council.

Curator Bios

Allison Yearwood

Allison Yearwood is an alumni of the University of Winnipeg, with a political science and business administration degree, and brings a fresh focus to the business of arts administration. Allison has recently returned to her hometown, Winnipeg, from the Banff Centre, where she was Program Manager at the Indigenous Arts Department. Previously, Allison served as Art and Business Manager at Yamaji Art, an Aboriginal art centre in Australia, and was the General Manager of Collective of Black Artists in Toronto. Allison was the Programming and Events Coordinator at the Northern Life Museum & Cultural Centre in Fort Smith, North West Territories, and was the first non-Indigenous staff member at Urban Shaman Gallery in Winnipeg. Allison advocates for racialized and disenfranchised groups to decolonize institutions of power from the ground up. She is exceptionally skilled on issues of equity and a powerful and transformative voice for anti-racism action. Allison's institutional critique articulates the creation of safe spaces for underserved communities within the institution. She is also the chair of ace art and board member at large for SpiderWeb Show.

Jenny Western

Jenny Western is a curator, writer, and artist based in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She holds an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Winnipeg and a Masters in Art History and Curatorial Practice from York University in Toronto. While completing her graduate studies, she accepted a position at the Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba in Brandon where she held the position of Curator and later became the AGSM's Adjunct Curator. Western has curated exhibitions and programs across Canada and she makes up one-third of the Sobey Award nominated art collective The Ephemerals. Western is of mixed European, Oneida, and Stockbridge-Musee ancestry and a member of the Brothertown Indian Nation of Wisconsin.



Vision:

Manitobans inspired, engaged, and connected through craft

Mission:

The mission of the Manitoba Craft Museum and Library is to:

- Collect, preserve, and hold historical and contemporary craft in trust
- Celebrate craft through exhibits, presentations, and programs
- Facilitate the exchange of ideas and build interest in and appreciation for craft

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