



Sheldon Pierre Louis
swi'cm - digging roots, 2023
4 x 8 feet
Acrylic on canvas

In the artists own words:

Our syilx laws are captured in our captikwł (oral stories), these teachings of the natural laws of the land were/are critical to human survival, as the People-To-Be had not been given instincts to survive. They were given memory instead.

In the beginning the tmix^w (Four Food Chiefs) discussed at great length the coming changes to their world. It was told that a new People would come to live on the earth. The Animal and Plant People had to find a way to help these new People-To-Be survive on the earth as they would be without instincts. The yəlyílmix^wm's (chiefs) skəmxíst (black bear), ntytyíx (king salmon), spíłəm (bitter root), and síya? (saskatoon berry) decided that they would all give their lives to be food for the People-To-Be. This is how food was given.

Although these teachings are generations upon generations old, the protocols on how to care for the tmx^wulax^w (land) and tmix^w (Four Food Chiefs) so that they return year after year to provide for us, are still passed down today. One of the teachings conveys how we care, give to, and help one another in a reciprocal way. To honour and always give our thanks.

spíłəm (bitter root) is the yəlyílmix^wm (chief) of all the roots and things that live in the earth. She is a representation of femininity, reciprocal relationships, and governance. She represents the sustenance of the natural and diverse eco, community, and family systems that govern and guide our peoples.

This is embodied in the strong resilient and loving image of a strńtíma/qàqna?, túm/sk^wuy, swawása?/statáka^wa? (grandmother, mother, aunt) digging traditional foods and medicines with her píca? (digging stick). She is carrying forward traditional teaching into a new contemporary space that is still the same in essence yet ever changing with the landscape. The image of a root digger is a relatable and familiar site to all of our syilx peoples. It conjures up smells of being on the land, the feel of the land beneath your feet, the language being spoken as we introduce ourselves to the tmx^wulax^w (land) and tmix^w (Four Food Chiefs). It refreshes and calls those blood memories of our ancestors, our grandmothers and our mothers being on the land and passing on the ceremonies and protocols to our young ones. It frames up the generational teachings, the blood memory imbedded in our DNA, the captikwł, the ceremonies and the protocols that carry the knowledge forward to today's generations. The care, the love, and the responsibility of upholding the natural laws.

When creating this new piece for the Kelowna Art Gallery's Public Art Collection I wanted to ensure that the art would speak to and capture something that is recognizable and relatable to who we are as syilx peoples both past and present. I wanted to ensure that 50 years from now or 100 years from now when this collection is viewed our syilx peoples can see themselves represented in the art. As this is syilx territories it is important that we too are acknowledged and honoured through the arts as well.

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Artist Biography

Sheldon Pierre Louis is a syilx (Okanagan) multi-disciplinary artist who resides at sənłuxuxtən (place where the grizzly bear killed them) on the Okanagan Indian Reserve IR#1 near Vernon, BC. Sheldon is the lead visual artist for Kama? Creative Aboriginal Arts Collective and a current sitting board member for the Greater Vernon Museum & Archives and a former board member of the Arts Council of the North Okanagan. Sheldon has spent the last 6 years as a member of Okanagan Indian Band Chief and Council but has now moved on from political work back to full time artist.

As a visual artist Sheldon has mentored under his Father Gerald Louis for most of his life and has also mentored under Barb Marchand, both multi-disciplinary syilx artists. Under their mentorship Sheldon learned about sketching, painting, print making, traditional materials, carving and curating. Sheldon has mentored mural artist Michelle Loughery, as a youth participant in the Downtown Vernon Mural Project 2001. Sheldon has since created his own youth mural projects and has also participated in the Nelson International Mural Festival, The Uptown Mural Festival, the Summerland Making Waves Mural Festival as well as painted numerous murals throughout the Okanagan territory. Sheldon has also recently mentored under Dion Kaszas, a nłaka'pamux multi-disciplinary artist, in the practice of indigenous hand poke tattooing.

Sheldon's syilx roots has shaped his style and informed the connection of his art with land, language, culture, environment, and indigenous activism. The indigenous peoples of this land have faced and continue to face many acts of colonial violence and Sheldon uses his art to bring a voice and conversations to the systemic issues that plague the indigenous peoples of this country.

Sheldon's fine art can also be found on the walls of University of British Columbia Okanagan and in their Public Art Collection. Sheldon's most prized piece of work is the "Convocational Mace of University of British Columbia Okanagan" which is a hand carved wood piece, that is carried in the annual convocational ceremony every year at the University, this piece now sits on display in the UBCO administrations building. Sheldon is a past participating artist for the UBC Okanagan Indigenous Summer Arts Intensive - 2019 Artist Residency, UBC Okanagan.

As part of a past exhibition during the Covid-19 pandemic with the Kelowna Art Gallery at the Kelowna International Airport, Sheldon was named by Air Canada as number 1 best art in airport around the world for 2020. Sheldon will also have a newly created painting commissioned and added to the Public Art Collection of the Kelowna Art Gallery. Another notable commission is a piece that is part a unique meeting room inside ROGERS brand-new Customer Solution Centre in Kelowna called the Downie-Wenjack Legacy Space. In partnership with the Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund, the space is dedicated to raising awareness and understanding of Indigenous art, history, and culture, with ROGERS teams and community members.

Sheldon is the recipient of 2015 First Peoples Cultural Council Emerging Artist grant, the 2016 First Peoples Cultural Council, Emerging Artist Development grant and the 2020 First Peoples Cultural Council, Sharing Across Generations grant. His art work can also be found in the offices of the First Peoples Cultural Council.

Sheldon's works and contact info can be viewed on his website:

<https://boundbyafeather.wixsite.com/boundbyafeather>