YUKON PRIZE
for visual arts

2023
FINALISTS' EXHIBITION

Mark Kelly Photography

THE YUKON PRIZE: VISION

The Yukon Prize for Visual Arts will recognize excellence by Yukon visual artists and be a catalyst for the promotion of Yukon visual art across Canada.

The prize has three goals:

- To provide a financial prize of $20,000 to one Yukon artist that will help them focus full-time on creating art.
- To promote Yukon art and Yukon artists within the Yukon, nationally and internationally.
- To foster a culture of curatorial critique and discourse in the Yukon and encourage artists to be the best they can possibly be.

Our goal is that the award and exhibits of the finalists' works will create opportunities for Yukon artists. We hope it will inspire connections between Yukon artists and the visual arts community in the rest of Canada, providing increased visibility, artistic development, and potential for sales. One of the six finalists will receive the $20,000 Yukon Prize. The others will each receive $3,000. The Yukon Prize is intended to be a biennial event. The Yukon Prize website will house an online gallery of the works of past finalists.

The Yukon Prize Committee

KAYLYN BAKER GIVING A TOUR OF HER ARTWORKS
IN THE 2023 YUKON PRIZE FINALISTS' EXHIBITION

NOTE FROM THE CURATOR

The 2023 Yukon Prize stands as a testament to the multifaceted and vibrant landscape of art in the Yukon. The exhibition rejects the notion that any one label can define us, rather it celebrates the diversity of practice as varied and boundless as the northern landscapes that inspire us. From beadwork to Indigenous comics, storytelling to installation art, soundscapes to photography, these artists transcend boundaries, challenge norms, and contribute to the Yukon's artistic heritage.

We are profoundly grateful to our esteemed panel of jurors—Heather Igloliorte, Michelle Jacques, and Sarah Milroy—who undertook the challenging task of selecting the artists featured in this exhibition and ultimately, the recipient of the 2023 Yukon Prize, Kaylyn Baker. Their thoughtful selection reflects their curiosity about the wide range of complex artistic expressions that emanate from this region. With each artist they chose, they unveiled a captivating facet of the Yukon's artistic identity, demonstrating the richness and depth of talent that flourishes in our remote northern territory.

The 2023 Yukon Prize has been awarded to Kaylyn Baker, a Northern Tutchone and Tlingit artist. Her mastery of beadwork is a practice that marries tradition with innovation. From jewelry to regalia to fashion, her works are a vivid expression of her beaded storytelling, a profound journey of self-discovery, and a connection to her ancestors.

As a finalist, Jeffrey Langille takes us on an auditory and visual voyage. His work with sound and video is a fusion of the tangible and the ephemeral, inviting us to immerse ourselves in a sensory experience where chance and spontaneity reign. Through his innovative compositions, Langille redefines our perception of the world.

Rebekah Miller's exploration of "skin" as a metaphor for identity and nature invites us to question our relationship with the natural world. Her multidisciplinary approach, spanning drawing, sculpture, printmaking, and photography, reimagines our connection to our surroundings, urging us to look beyond the surface.

Cole Pauls, a Champagne and Aishihik First Nations citizen and Tahltan comic artist, has embarked on a mission to tell the stories of Yukon First Nations authentically. Through his comics, infused with traditional language and culture, he dispels stereotypes and provides a window into the rich traditions of Yukon Indigenous communities.

Omar Reyna blurs the boundaries between the real and the imagined through photography-based projects. His art is an exploration of the unseen, a journey into the philosophical and poetic aspects of image-making.

Alainnah Whachell's meticulous beadwork challenges our consumer-driven society, offering a unique commentary on the allure of fashion imagery. Her transformation of digital screenshots into tactile art is a thought-provoking exploration of desire and materiality in the digital age.

The 2023 Yukon Prize exhibition is an ode to diversity, an acknowledgment that the Yukon is a place where art knows no boundaries. It reflects the spirit of a territory that embraces the old and the new, tradition and innovation, and the tangible and the abstract. As we explore these artists' works, we are reminded that art, like the Yukon itself, is an ever-evolving landscape, one that resists categorization and thrives on the creativity of its inhabitants.

We invite you to immerse yourself in the world of these talented artists, to celebrate their unique voices, and to join us in embracing the great diversity within Yukon art practice. Through their creations, we are reminded that art has the power to transcend boundaries, unite communities, and spark conversations. We hope you find inspiration and connection in the works of these remarkable Yukon artists.

Mary Bradshaw
Director of Visual Arts, Yukon Arts Centre

MESSAGE FROM THE YUKON PRIZE CO-FOUNDERS

When we first floated the idea of establishing a prize to recognize excellence in Yukon arts, we didn't know what to expect. We consulted widely to make sure that artists and the arts community would support and benefit from a new prize. So many people encouraged us. With their valuable advice, we plunged into unknown waters. Sometimes the things that scare you the most are the things that end up being the most rewarding, so we proceeded to plan the inaugural prize.

After two years of work, the first Yukon Prize was awarded in November 2021. Our plans for an in-person gala were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but we were still able to present a wonderful exhibition of the finalists' works at the Yukon Arts Centre Gallery. We held an online gala and all three jurors braved -30C temperatures and the pandemic to come to Whitehorse. The inaugural Yukon Prize raised the profile of Yukon art in the larger Canadian art world, and the positive media coverage brought 2021 recipient Joseph Tisiga and the other five finalists greater recognition. In 2022, we brought the finalists' works to Art Vancouver. We continue to promote awareness of outstanding Yukon artists, who are increasingly taking their rightful place in the Canadian art world.

For the 2023 Yukon Prize, we introduced a longlist, in order to showcase a larger number of artists. In total, 65 artists applied for the Yukon Prize this year, and we are very grateful to them for putting themselves out there. The Yukon has so many talented artists and only some of them can be selected each time. As juror Michelle Jacques stated, "There was so much talent represented in this year's applications!" The Yukon Prize is offered every two years, and each cycle, there is a new jury and a new opportunity for more Yukon artists to be recognized.

This year, we were delighted to be able to host a number of in-person events to facilitate dialogue and sharing among Yukon artists and art lovers from within the Yukon and beyond.

The 2023 Yukon Prize weekend included the finalists' exhibition opening, an art crawl with 19 locations in downtown Whitehorse, panel discussions with the jurors and curators from outside the Yukon, seminars, workshops, and tours of the show by the artists. A highlight of the weekend was the gala show and reception, where Kaylyn Baker was announced as the recipient of the 2023 Yukon Prize. We were honoured to be welcomed into the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council by Chief Sean Smith leading the Kwanlin Dághàłaan K'e dancers, reminding us of the rich culture and history of these lands that we are so grateful to live on.

The Yukon is rich in artistic talent of all kinds, and we were pleased to feature talented musicians, dancers, and six local chefs at the gala, bringing together visual, performing, and culinary arts in a celebration of Yukon creativity. None of this would have been possible without our incredible partners and volunteers who put in countless hours to make this happen. This year, for the first time, we also have corporate sponsors for whom we are very grateful. Check out the last two pages of the catalogue for the wonderful people who make this possible!

One of the goals of the Yukon Prize is to provide $20,000 to one Yukon artist to help them focus full-time on creating art and give them the time to work towards being the best they can possibly be. Kaylyn Baker expresses the challenges facing artists well. She states, *"I want to do these bigger things, bigger pieces. I want to be able to explore. The real balance is trying to create for passion and creating for a living, and that is really difficult for me to do [financially]. That was a huge driver for me to put myself out there and apply for the Yukon Prize."* The Yukon Prize exists to support artists in this quest to expand their practice without financial pressure.

The prize is also intended to help make Yukon artists better known nationally and internationally. We now have the artworks of the 2021 finalists, the 2023 longlisted artists, and the 2023 finalists on the Yukon Prize website. The website is becoming an online gallery of some of the best contemporary Yukon art.

The vision continues. Plans are already underway for the 2025 Yukon Prize. We hope to attract more art lovers to the Yukon to see the incredible talent of Yukon artists. We also want to find more ways for outstanding Yukon artists to show their art in the rest of Canada. We look forward to seeing you in Whitehorse in 2025!

Julie Jai and David Trick
Co-founders

Michael Edwards

THE JURYING PROCESS

The goals of the Yukon Prize include fostering curatorial discourse and making Yukon artists better known outside of the Yukon. Curators, critics, and collectors outside the Yukon have limited access to Yukon art. Without greater awareness, there is a tendency to assume that the three northern territories are all the same. Few Canadians could name any Yukon artists.

We believe that encouraging artists to submit their best work to a jury from outside the Yukon is an important step toward making Yukon artists better known. Seeing the work of the applicants brings jurors face-to-face with the quality, richness, and diversity of Yukon art. Selecting the right jury is critical to bringing credibility to the prize and to providing exposure for the applicants to key voices in the art world outside the Yukon.

This year, we were fortunate once again to have a fabulous jury representing a wide range of professional skills, geographic and work experience, and lived experience. We were delighted that Heather Igloliorte, Michelle Jacques, and Sarah Milroy agreed to be on the 2023 jury.

Each has made an enormous time commitment, including coming to Whitehorse to select the winner, speak at the gala celebration on September 16, and participate in a public panel discussion. The Yukon Prize recipient is only chosen after all the jurors have had a chance to see the finalists' artworks in Whitehorse.

It's a lengthy process to get to the September announcement of the Yukon Prize recipient. Yukon artists were invited to apply between January 1 and February 28, 2023, through a straightforward online application form. We partnered with the Yukon government, which funded photography for artists in Whitehorse and Dawson who didn't yet have professional-grade images of their work. We encouraged all artists to consider applying, regardless of their medium or whether they are full-time or part-time artists. To this end, the rules specify that eligible artworks include (but are not limited to) painting, carving, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, electronic media, photography, textiles, glass, regalia, jewelry, and drawing.

The criteria for the Yukon Prize are set out in the rules as follows: *The prize recognizes excellence by Yukon visual artists. It recognizes artists whose work demonstrates technical proficiency and reflects a unique artistic "voice" in theme, method, or practice, referencing traditions and/or the contemporary realm.*

Building on our experience with the inaugural prize in 2021, we decided to add a longlist in 2023, so that we would have the opportunity to promote a larger number of Yukon artists and share their work on our website and social media.

The longlisted artists were announced on May 12, 2023:

Justin Apperley, *Dawson City*

Jackie Olson, *Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, Dawson City*

Kaylyn Baker, *Selkirk First Nation, residing in Whitehorse*

Cole Pauls, *Champagne and Aishihik First Nations citizen and Tahltan, residing in Vancouver*

Jeffrey Langille, *Dawson City*

Nicole Rayburn, *Dawson City*

Robyn McLeod, *Deh Gáh Got'ı̨ę First Nation, residing in Ross River*

Omar Reyna, *Whitehorse*

Meshell Melvin, *Whitehorse*

Rosemary Scanlon, *Whitehorse*

Rebekah Miller, *Dawson City*

Alainnah Whachell, *Whitehorse*

The jurors met again in May to select the six finalists who were announced on June 14 and whose work is showcased in this catalogue. The jury was well supported by the jury moderator, Indigenous artist and curator Heather Von Steinhagen.

We feel fortunate to have had the benefit of an independent jury from outside the territory to judge the Yukon Prize. The Yukon Prize Committee was not involved in the jurying process, did not see the applications, or even find out who had applied. It is important for artists to know that the process is merit-based and not subject to any potential influence, no matter how indirect or unconscious, by those involved in organizing the Yukon Prize. We were happy to leave the hard work of selecting the six finalists and the overall prize recipient to the jury. As one of the jury members commented, "It was not an easy task for us to produce our long and short lists!" We are most grateful to our exceptional jurors.

Julie Jai and David Trick

HEATHER IGLOLIORTE

Inuk-Newfoundlander, Nunatsiavut, independent curator and professor in the Department of Visual Arts, University of Victoria

There was a lot of distinctiveness amongst the artists. Many of the applications took the beautiful Yukon landscape into consideration and drew on the natural environment in a number of ways, whether that was through photography and a depiction of the land, or materials harvested from the land, like natural dyes.

There was no one kind of unifying feature that brought all of the artists together—there was a dizzying array of different media and messages and a real diversity of practice in the finalists.

I think that the Yukon is very impressive. Even as a northerner, I was not aware of everything that is happening here.

MICHELLE JACQUES

Head of exhibitions and collections/chief curator at the Remai Modern gallery in Saskatoon.

Something that each artist addressed in their writing about their work or themselves was place, and how important not just the environment of the Yukon but the community was to how they saw themselves as an artist, how they made their work.

I like the idea of people being able to have a successful arts career and stay connected to the place that that really feeds them. I think that the prize is a great strategy to draw attention to what is going on there and creating a situation where the emphasis is put on the there. It's not "we've got great artists to send out." It's "you should be looking at what is here."

There was so much talent represented in this year's applications; it was not an easy task for us to produce our long and short lists! It was a very stimulating and enjoyable process, and I extend my profound gratitude to all the artists who shared their work with us and everyone involved in bringing the prize to life.

Tom Sandler

SARAH MILROY

Chief curator and executive director of the of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, and former chief art critic for the Globe and Mail.

I have a sense of Whitehorse, and of the Yukon generally, as a place that has this very strong sense of identity culturally, and confidence in its own traditions, but it also is a place where many people have moved to from all over the world, seeking out a different kind of life than they had before. So you have that blend: People who belong and are deeply rooted in this place, and also the people who are seeking. Both are coming together here and creating community. There are so many different stories. It's very rich that way.

The applicants for this prize exemplified the diversity of approaches to making art that are alive and well in the Yukon, from beadwork and weaving to electronic sound works and sculptural installation. It was a privilege to be immersed in such a rich feast of creativity.

THE OPENING AND FINALISTS' TOURS OF THE SHOW

September 14, 2023
The Yukon Arts Centre, Whitehorse

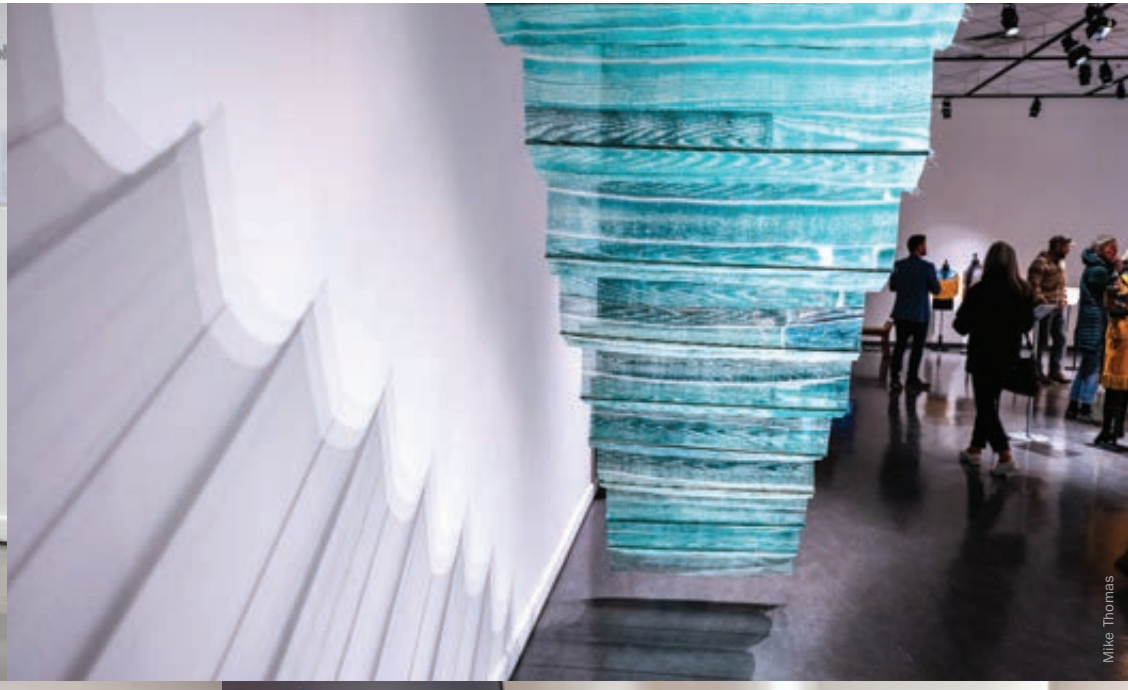
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: VISITORS AT EXHIBITION OPENING ON SEPTEMBER 14, 2023; MEDIA INTERVIEWING COLE PAULS AT OPENING; ARTWORKS BY REBEKAH MILLER, JEFFREY LANGILLE, COLE PAULS, KAYLYN BAKER, ALAINNAH WHACHELL AND OMAR REYNA

Mark Kelly Photography

Mike Thomas

Mike Thomas

Mark Kelly Photography


Mike Thomas

Mark Kelly Photography

Mark Kelly Photography

Mark Kelly Photography

SHINING A LIGHT ON YUKON ARTISTS AND THEIR STORIES

Living in the Yukon has influenced the art of each of the six 2023 Yukon Prize finalists. In some of the works, this effect is evident, while in others, the influence is conveyed in more subtle, almost imperceptible ways.

Kaylyn Baker's beadwork is inspired by the land, her memories, and stories she's been told. A sparkling fish she beaded and mounted on a bright-blue electric guitar, for instance, was based on a true tale from her community of Pelly Crossing. An elder was fishing on the frozen river when the piece of ice she was standing on broke off and she began to float downriver. Though panicked community members shouted out to her, she calmly grabbed her grayling and jumped back onto the thick, stable ice. "I knew right away that I wanted to create something based off of legendizing that story," Baker says. She wrote a poem, set long ago, to accompany the beaded grayling. In her revision of the story, the fish was one of the last giant animals, and when the elder caught it, she fed the whole town. "Beading became a way for me to really tell stories and to remember people and places," she says.

For Jeffrey Langille, moving to Dawson City in 2015 prompted him to begin thinking differently about sound. Walking along the Yukon River at -40C, he'd film the ice fog rising off the water, and notice sounds, like bits of ice moving, a snowmobile in the distance, or a raven's caw. This new fascination with sound led him to buy an electric guitar, which then led him to experiment with effects pedals, noise and drone synthesizers, and electronic music. That might have never happened if he'd stayed down south—for a very practical reason. "If I was in Vancouver, I probably would have bought an acoustic guitar," Langille says. "But winters in the Yukon are really hard on acoustic guitars. And I didn't want to buy a guitar, fall in love with it, and then have it crack because of the temperature extremes."

The concept of home is a theme in Rebekah Miller's work, something she found in Dawson City after moving around frequently when she was younger. "There are artists, there are hunters, everybody has different political persuasions and backgrounds," she says. That felt in a way like her own background; her mother's side of the family is academic, while her father's side has a background in manual labour. "It was, to some extent, quite soothing to be in such a diverse community because there's been such a separation for me my entire life," Miller says. Moving to Dawson changed her art dramatically; she started coming up with conceptual ideas and creating a real body of work. She found inspiration in the natural world, skinning trees and sewing zippers into the birch bark, creating detailed drawings of grouse, and fashioning

a corset of porcupine quills and birch bark. Many of her pieces share the themes of home and memory. “It’s taken a lot for me in my life to feel like I really belonged anywhere,” Miller says. “This is the first time I’ve felt like I actually am settling down in a place and building my own home.”

Since he was a child, Cole Pauls’ dream was to be a comic artist. He grew up in Haines Junction, reading *Calvin and Hobbes* and drawing constantly. Pauls found the winters long and difficult, so he’d pour himself into his art as an escape, drawing at the desk in his bedroom or taking over his mom’s sewing table in the basement. “Every winter, it was like going into the hyperbolic chamber from *Dragon Ball Z*, where I could really focus and just create,” he says. Come summer, the midnight sun meant endless energy, and he’d stay up into the wee hours of the morning drawing. “I always found living in the Yukon was the ultimate training ground for being an artist, because the landscapes are so inspiring and the community is so strong and supportive. And then you have all this time to just work and be productive.”

Omar Reyna isn’t sure how his art would look if he’d stayed in Mexico City. Reyna moved to the Yukon in 2008, a vastly different place from the bustling, crowded urban centre where he’s from. Living in Whitehorse has granted him easy access to forest—just across the street from his house. Reyna considers the wilderness his expanded studio. It’s where he goes to take photographs, listen to music, and record audio for his art practice. “In some ways, the forest provides me with everything that I need for my photography,” he says. “The way that I like to work is by reading a lot, doing research about subjects that interest me, and then going into the forest just to feel and to work.” His close relationship with the woods, he says, is something he can’t fully describe.

Alainnah Whachell used to make large sculptures out of plaster and resin, back when she was attending art school in Vancouver. When she moved home to the Yukon, the logistics of creating that kind of work became challenging. She didn’t have space to cast plaster in her house and trying to ship materials north would have been costly. So instead Whachell gravitated towards beads. She’d done some beading at school and liked the tactile nature of the work. A subject for her art soon became evident: living in the Yukon, with less access to clothing stores, Whachell began online shopping. That got her thinking about capitalism and desire. “I kept noticing how I would buy these things and they never fulfilled me as much as I thought they would,” she says. These thoughts led her to start beading screenshots of fashion photos. “I was trying to deconstruct the psychological, economic structures that were making me want these objects.”

A sense of place was something the Yukon Prize jury saw in many of this year’s submissions. “It came up again and again,” says juror Michelle Jacques, who is head of exhibitions and collections/chief curator at Remai Modern in Saskatoon.

This struck Jacques, who has also lived and worked in Toronto, Halifax, and Victoria, as perhaps a unique quality of artists living outside the country’s main urban centres.

“I think that [for these artists], it can be quite common to think about place,” she says. “In bigger cities, they might be thinking about their work in a less rooted way, thinking about how it lines up with work being made by other artists in big art centres like New York or Los Angeles or London, rather than digging into their relationship to a place.”

Place is a concept that’s inseparable from the Yukon Prize and its raison d’être. Founded in 2021 by Julie Jai and David Trick, the prize’s goals are to promote Yukon art across Canada, build connections between Yukon artists and the national arts community, and foster curatorial discourse in the territory.

Jai, who has worked and lived in the Yukon on and off since 1996, has long been aware of the talent of Yukon artists. She’s also learned, though, just how little Canadians down south know about Yukon art. When she talked to fellow art lovers in Toronto, they’d think that northern art and Inuit art were synonymous, or they’d mix up Whitehorse and Yellowknife.

Jai began to think about how to broaden perspectives. “How could we help make the Yukon a destination for art, where people will come not just for hiking and fishing, but actually recognize that this is a real art hub?”

The Yukon Prize is two years into this mission. So far, it hasn't only been rewarding for the recipients and finalists.

"This is the most gratifying part of museum work—creating opportunities and platforms for artists that deserve attention and encouragement," says juror Sarah Milroy, who is the chief curator at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario. "This kind of get-together is not only a great way to do new research, but also to share pollen with other pollinators."

This cross-pollination is important, given the Yukon is far from Canada's big cities—and as an extension of that, its top galleries and museums. This, certainly, is one reason why Yukon artists have traditionally been little-known outside the territory, though that singular focus on big-city artists is widening.

Heather Igloliorte, an Inuk art historian, curator, and professor in the department of visual arts at the University of Victoria who was on this year's jury, has noticed exciting developments across the circumpolar art world. At the Venice Biennale last year, she points out, Sámi artists represented the Nordic countries, while next year, Greenlander artist Inuuteq Storch will represent Denmark there.

"I think it's a great time for Yukon artists to get some of that attention," Igloliorte says. "I see a lot of art from everywhere in the world, and it's exciting for Yukon artists to have that kind of profile."

Milroy agrees that the art world is shifting—and that's a good thing. Early in her career, there was little information about artists emerging from small communities. The internet has changed that.

"There's a commitment everywhere, across the board in museums, to rethink this notion of centre and margin, both culturally and geographically," she says. "I certainly would say I don't think there's any prejudice against artists who are not from the centre. Quite to the contrary. I think people are really quite keen to upset the applecart of hierarchy right now, which is a very healthy thing."

This appetite for unique stories, Milroy adds, means that there's probably never been a better time to be a Yukon artist.

The Yukon may have a small population, but it has a strong arts community. According to 2021 census data, it's home to the highest concentration of visual artists of any province or territory in the country. Accompanying this creative population are multiple art collectives, organizations, and events.

The Yukon is also home to an art school. As a teenager, Pauls had formative experiences at the Yukon School of Visual Arts (SOVA) in Dawson City. Every year, he'd spend a week in the youth art enrichment program, getting a taste of what art school would be like. After high school, Pauls spent a year at SOVA—"a dream come true," he says—before he moved south to attend Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

Certainly, there are additions to the arts ecosystem that the finalists would love to see, such as a contemporary gallery in Whitehorse, large, shared studio spaces, partnerships with southern galleries, and more relationship-building with artists in other circumpolar countries.

It can also be challenging to source materials, depending on the medium, and heading south for openings and shows is often an expensive endeavour.

"It's sort of a paradox," Miller admits. "If I had more accessibility, then the Yukon wouldn't be what it is anymore. So I don't really have a desire for things to change."

Arts infrastructure is one thing, but then there are all the intangible factors that make the Yukon a good place to create art.

"There's the immediate accessibility of the natural world, the supportive culture for artists, and just a different lifestyle from in a big city, where people find they're more able to be connected to their souls, which is where the source of their art comes from," Jai says.

Langille feels more freedom being in the Yukon. "After moving to Dawson City, I felt like I was more independent in a way," he says. "Stepping out of the art world in Vancouver made it feel like it didn't matter what I made."

Miller has a similar take. She likes being an artist in the Yukon because she doesn't feel exposed. It's challenging for her to show and talk about her work, and in Dawson, she doesn't feel like she has to. "It's totally embraced here that someone has a studio out in the woods, that they don't want to continually engage with a metropolitan area," she says. "You're not expected to do that."

For Baker, living in Whitehorse keeps her close to her family, including her grandmother in Pelly Crossing. "It makes me really proud to be able to say that I do what I do," she says of her beading. "I like that I'm able to make my grandma proud. She went to residential school, so it's really important for me to show her that I'm doing it. It's definitely something that helps drive me."

During the jurying process, Jacques considered the ways that art is perhaps defined differently, and more diversely, in a place like the Yukon versus elsewhere.

"Compared to other juries that I've been on, there was a huge range of work—the definition of art was quite expansive," she says. "That was really interesting, and it did make me think about how firm definitions and divisions between ways of making can be broken down in a place where the arts community is smaller and there's more interaction between people."

The jurors also noticed the role of "slow making"—lengthy, meticulous craftsmanship, often with obsessive attention to detail—in Baker's and Whachell's fine beading, Langille's sound creations, Miller's hand-sewn zippers in birchbark, the years-long germination of Pauls' comics, and Reyna's forest installations.

As Jacques has moved around the country, she's come to firmly believe that every community should have a strong contingent of artists, and that artists shouldn't have to leave the place that feeds them in order to become successful.

The idea of success, of course, is different for every artist. One definition, says Jai, is being able to make a living doing what you love. Her desire to help artists reach this level of success is personal for her. When she was growing up, Jai wanted to be a fashion designer, but her mother told her to become a doctor or lawyer instead and make art on the side.

"It was definitely the immigrant wisdom on how to succeed," Jai says.

Indeed, this was how her parents lived: her father worked full-time at a restaurant, her mother as a teaching assistant, and in their spare time, they founded a Cantonese opera society. They spent evenings and weekends at rehearsals, doing what they truly loved.

"I now realize that they never had the luxury of being full-time artists themselves, though they were definitely talented enough to have been," Jai says. "I think that's part of what drives me, is recognizing that there's so many people who have talent, but they're forced to work at day jobs. After my parents died, I realized how sad that was for them—I wish that they'd been able to do something more with the talents that they had, and I thought about how nice it would be to give back to someone else."

It's exciting to be able to share the diverse and imaginative artworks of this year's Yukon Prize finalists—their art and their stories are created and grounded in the Yukon, but their talent definitely deserves an audience across Canada and beyond.

Rhiannon Russell

KAYLYN BAKER
2023 YUKON PRIZE RECIPIENT

Kaylyn Baker is a Northern Tutchone and Tlingit artist from the Yukon. A Selkirk First Nation citizen, she lives in Whitehorse. Baker is an avid bead artist, using a variety of traditional and contemporary materials and textiles. She draws on the principles of visual art to create her own designs.

In addition to making jewelry, Baker's beadwork adorns garments and accessories, including mukluks, moccasins, purses, and regalia. Her work has walked the red carpet at the Emmy Awards, and she was a featured designer at Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week 2022 as well as at the 2022 Adäka Cultural Festival fashion show in Whitehorse. She's also had a solo exhibition at Yukon Arts Centre.

For Baker, beading is a way to connect with her ancestors through her spontaneous style of beaded storytelling. She began beading in 2014, when she decided to create her daughter's regalia. After beading a belt and six patches, she was hooked. When she began working with fellow Yukon bead artist Heather Dickson, Baker learned how to incorporate gems and quills. She also began tufting using caribou hair.

In 2016, one of Baker's family members, Raine, died. While she was grieving him, she began beading a design inspired by her thoughts of him. That turned into one of her signature designs—called "Rainestorm"—and she realized she could capture his memory and other stories though her beadwork.

HUNTING & GATHERING

2022–23

SHEARED BEAVER, GREEN VELVET, BLACK ACID WASH MOOSE HIDE, EMBROIDERY CANVAS, SNARE WIRE, KLONDIKE GOLD NUGGETS ENCASED IN GLASS, STRAWBERRY QUARTZ, 24 KARAT GOLD PLATED BEADS, PORCUPINE QUILLS, A BLEND OF CONTEMPORARY & VINTAGE BEADS, EMBROIDERY, BUGLE BEADS, SUNSTONE, CARIBOU HAIR TUFTING, HOWLITE, B.C. JADE, OBSIDIAN, MALACHITE, EMERALDS, SAPPHIRE, COPPER PLATED BEADS, ANTIQUE ORANGE WHITE HEARTS, TURQUOISE, BLACK ONYX, GARNET, PURPLE JADE & TWO CARIBOU ANTLER BEADS; SEAWEED

CAMO VEST – COMMERCIAL TANNED MOOSE HIDE, BLACK MELTON WOOL, FLANNEL LINING; GATHERING THIGH HIGH

MUKLUKS – RED FOX FUR, A BLEND OF CONTEMPORARY & VINTAGE BEADS, 24 KARAT GOLD, CORAL, GARNET, ABALONE SHELL, PERUVIAN OPAL, BUGLE BEADS, EMBROIDERY, CARIBOU HAIR TUFTING, PORCUPINE QUILLS

I was out for a cruise when my cousin saw a moose & my grandpa didn't believe him I don't remember if he cried, but my cousin didn't lie & soon after my grandpa shot it I tried to be brave, when I seen that big moose face, but I never really seen that before. Its tongue was off to the side, my eyes were so wide, as grandpa showed us what to do. That was one of my first hunting experiences that I can remember. It was crazy to see, but i knew I loved dry meat, so I stood there quiet & waited.

Another time I was in the woods with my mom when she randomly screamed, "wahoo"! We were out picking berries & although it was scary, I thought it was just something you do. Pick, pick, wahoo! So I did it too, thought we were having fun with those berries I later found out, when she'd let out her shout…It was for bears, not for berries. That was one of my first gathering memories.

”

A STORYTELLER'S PRIDE

2022

AURORA SHAWL – EMERALDS, CONTEMPORARY BEADS, BLACK ACID WASH MOOSE HIDE, DYED ERMINE FUR, SEQUINS, EMBROIDERY, & BLACK MELTON WOOL.

SKIRT – KAYLYN BAKER DESIGNS AURORA BEADWORK PRINT.

LEGEND OF THE GIANT GRAYLING

2022

BEADED ELECTRIC GUITAR – ABALONE, FINE SILVER PLATED SEED BEADS, SWAROVSKI CRYSTALS, RAW DIAMONDS, 24 KARAT GOLD PLATED BEADS, MOTHER OF PEARL, & SMALL VINTAGE BEAD DETAIL

GUITAR STRAP – HOME TANNED MOOSE HIDE, FLANNEL LINING & SEED BEADS.

Mark Kelly Photography

Mark Kelly Photography

SUNRISE SLIPPERS

2023

CARIBOU ANTLER, SEED BEADS, MOOSEHIDE, MELTON, YUKON TRAPPED LYNX FUR.

Mike Thomas

SPARK

2023

MOONSTONE, HOWLITE, AUSTRALIAN OPAL, KLONDIKE NUGGETS ENCASED IN A GLASS BEAD, PORCUPINE QUILLS, OBSIDIAN, BUGLE BEADS, EMERALDS, SNOWFLAKE OBSIDIAN, SILVER BEADS.

HIDE FRINGE DRESS – WHITE ELK HIDE, WHITE SEED BEADS, 100% COTTON FLANNEL LINING.

FUR BOA – NATURAL AND DYED FOX FUR.

You see it [my work], and it's pleasing to the eye, and then you hear my thought process behind it. And then when you look at it again, everything's transformed, and everything's different, and you realize that everything I've done is intentional.

”

WINTER SUNDOG
2022
WHITE ELK HIDE, RIBBON, COMMERCIAL TANNED MOOSE HIDE, DYED BLUE FOX FUR, 24 KARAT GOLD PLATED BEADS, PORCUPINE QUILLS, RUBIES, RHODONITE, CARIBOU HAIR TUFTING, RAW DIAMONDS, & EMBROIDERY.

JEFFREY LANGILLE

Jeffrey Langille began filmmaking in the ’90s in Vancouver, editing Super 8 on his kitchen table. His practice has retained this connection to materiality, including work with tape loops, analog synthesizers, 16mm film, and video. His areas of interest include poetic language, experimental electronic music, noise music, and other experiments in sound.

Born in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Langille spent many years in Vancouver, and now resides in Dawson City, on the traditional territory of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation.

Working with time-based media gives Langille a direct, sensory engagement with materials. Electronic instruments are highly responsive in real time. Editing magnetic tape demands a slow attentiveness and acceptance of the unexpected.

His tape-loop series brings attention to the apparatus of sound reproduction. Obsolete machines generate poetic elements such as rhythm and repetition, sometimes pushed to humorous absurdity. Similarly, music for modular synthesizers reveals an astonishing technology for experimentation and for courting chance processes.

These approaches allow materials and ideas to reveal themselves, and for Langille to relinquish some control over what he makes. He sees all of his work as acts of participation, himself a kind of conduit, where the outcome is not known in advance.

Langille has exhibited work in Canada and internationally.

in the key of three
2023
HD VIDEO, SOUND, 2:28 MIN.

VIDEO STILLS FROM
songs for machines

afternoon, may 20, 2022 sequence
2022
HD VIDEO, SOUND, 0:50 MIN.

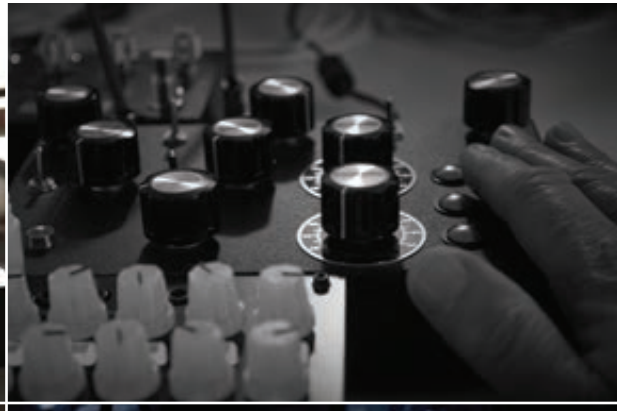
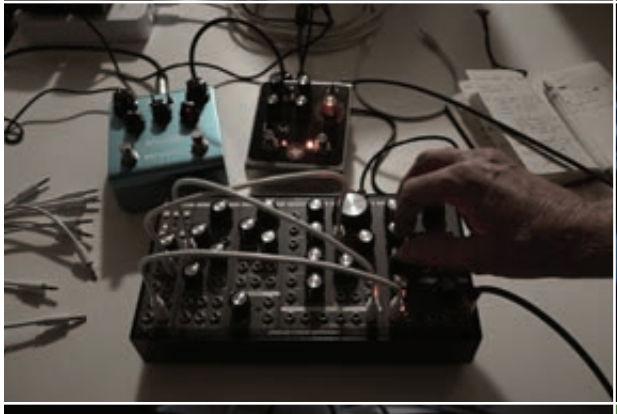
touch
2022
HD VIDEO, SOUND, 2:12 MIN.

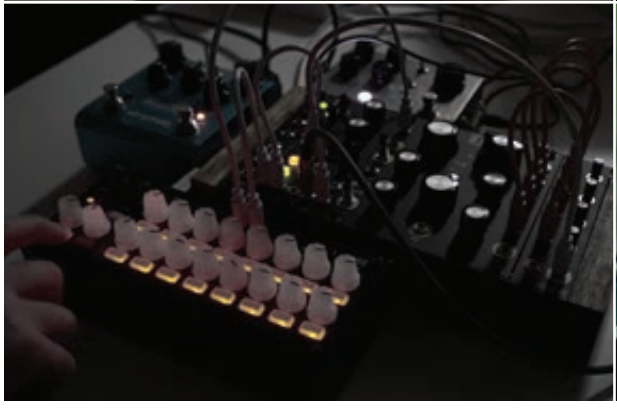
sample and hold no. 5
2022
HD VIDEO, SOUND, 3:19 MIN.

4:00 am
2022
HD VIDEO, SOUND, 2:08 MIN.

birdkids glide sequence
2023
HD VIDEO, SOUND, 1:13 MIN.

afternoon, june 21, 2023
2023
HD VIDEO, SOUND, 1:20 MIN.



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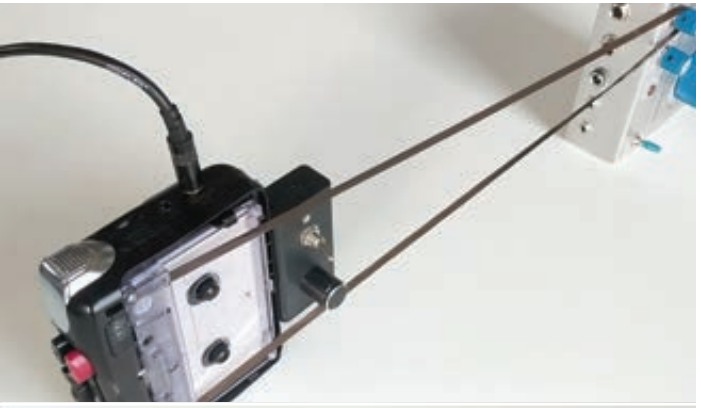
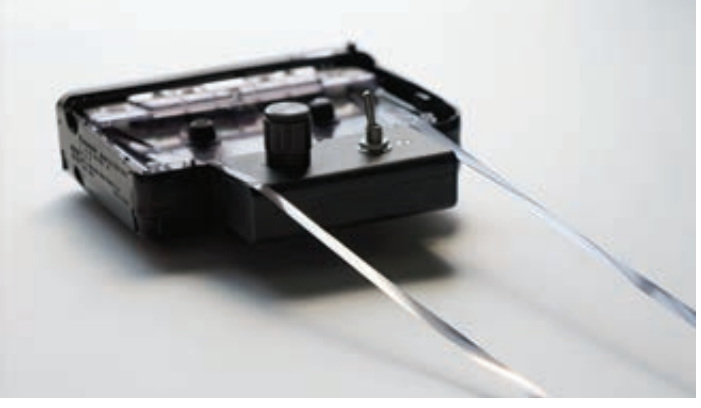




VIDEO STILLS FROM *endless loop*

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)

underground
2020
SD VIDEO, SOUND, 0:58 MIN. VIDEO LOOP

endless loop no. 1
2021
HD VIDEO, SOUND, 0:48 MIN. VIDEO LOOP;
76 CM TAPE LOOP

insensitive incentive
2021
HD VIDEO, SOUND, 1:00 MIN. VIDEO LOOP;
12-SECOND TAPE LOOP MADE FROM AN
EARLIER TAPE LOOP POEM CUT INTO
16 PIECES, 3.5 CM EACH, THEN SPLICED
BACK TOGETHER IN RANDOM ORDER

star light
2021
HD VIDEO, SOUND, 0:50 MIN. VIDEO LOOP;
TEXT-TO-SPEECH APP "READING" AN
EXCERPT FROM TENDER BUTTONS (1914)
BY GERTRUDE STEIN; 78.5 CM TAPE LOOP

I'm really fascinated by how these instruments allow me to make something in an interactive way. So the way I use these instruments is I don't approach it with the sound in my head that I want to create. I approach the instrument with the idea of having an encounter with it… I'm discovering new processes and new sounds and new ways to use the instrument all the time. So it's a constant interaction between me and the instrument.

”

elegy
2018
HD VIDEO, 16MM AND SUPER 8 FILM TRANSFERRED TO VIDEO, SOUND, 22:23 MIN.

credit: modified Walkman-style tape machine by Jared Foldy (FoldyMakes)

REBEKAH MILLER

Rebekah Miller lives and maintains her art practice in Dawson City. She completed her BFA at the Alberta College of Art and Design in 2008 and her MFA at the San Francisco Art Institute in 2011.

Working in various mediums including drawing, sculpture, printmaking, and photography, Miller's practice is informed through human interactions with nature conveyed through notions of "skin." The notion of the skin as a form of clothing—a covering, as well as a primary indicator of the form in question—is a central concept within her practice.

Through the act of skinning, whether it is through the tactile imprint of the architecture, the removed exterior of a natural object, or the reinterpretation of its form, Miller aims to provide an entry point into the elemental home, itself forming the matrix of our relationship to the natural world.

She intends for the viewer to gain a deeper understanding of our relationship to nature through the metaphoric inhabitation of these skins, as well as to transport the viewer back into a landscape outside of modern culture—to a habitation more heavily rooted in the subliminal but also anchored in basic practices such as hunting, gathering, building, and dwelling.

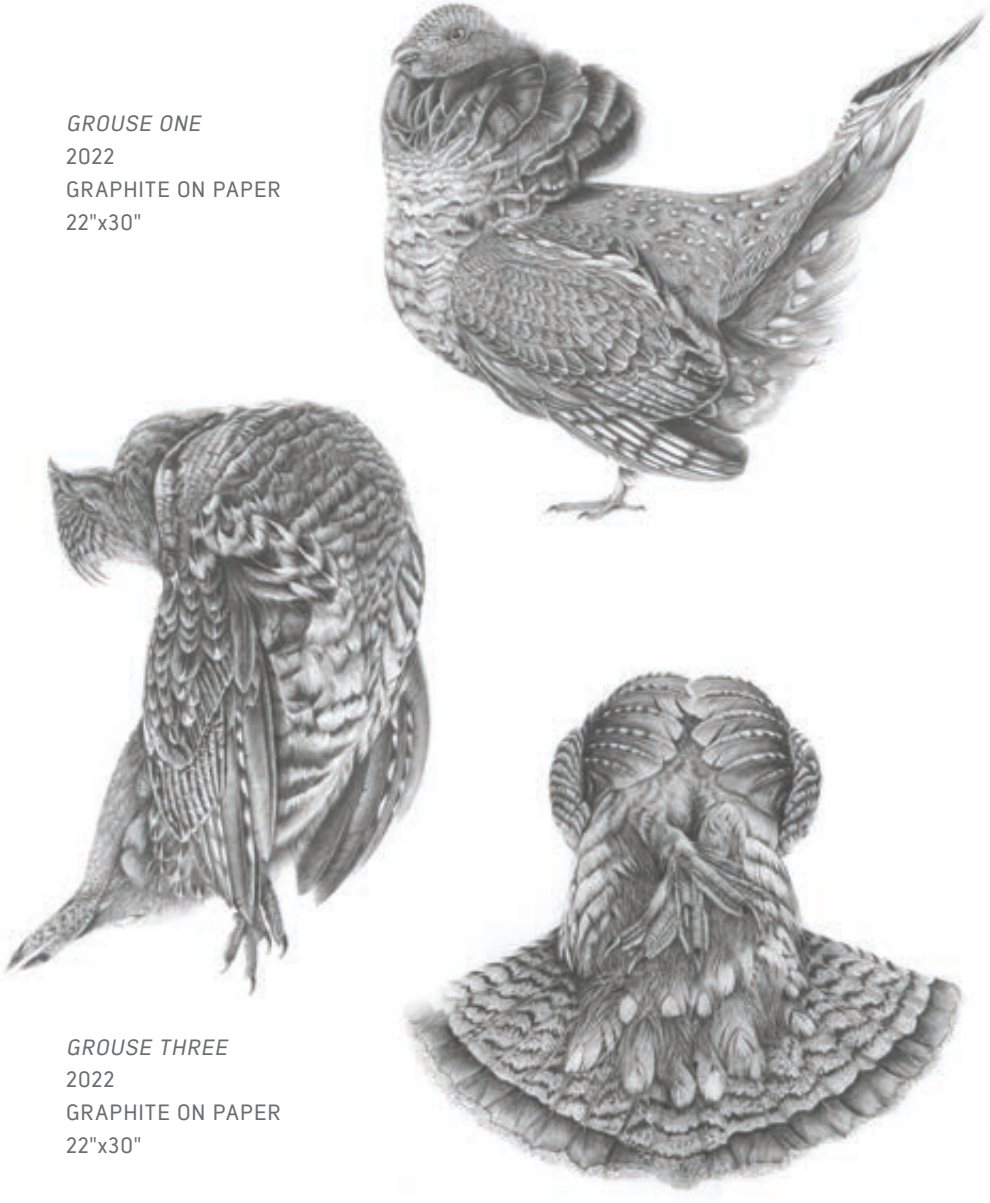
By removing these subjects from their natural environments and rendering them, they become objects of ornamentation and even reverence. In these transformations, Miller hopes to evoke a recognition of the simultaneous celebration and subjugation of nature.

Mark Kelly Photography

STAIRCASE
2023
RELIEF PRINT ON FABRIC

GROUSE FIVE
2023
GRAPHITE ON PAPER
5'x10'

GROUSE TWO
2022
GRAPHITE ON PAPER
22"x30"



GROUSE ONE
2022
GRAPHITE ON PAPER
22"x30"

GROUSE THREE
2022
GRAPHITE ON PAPER
22"x30"

I need to make art in a vacuum. And so I really do well when I'm able to retreat to my studio and feel like I'm not exposed while making work. But what's great about being here is that at any point in time when I want to show my work, people actually are really enthusiastic. They want to talk and you could have so many collaborators or co-artists who are here that you can talk to and who want to talk to you.

”

GROUSE FOUR
2022
GRAPHITE ON PAPER
22"x30"

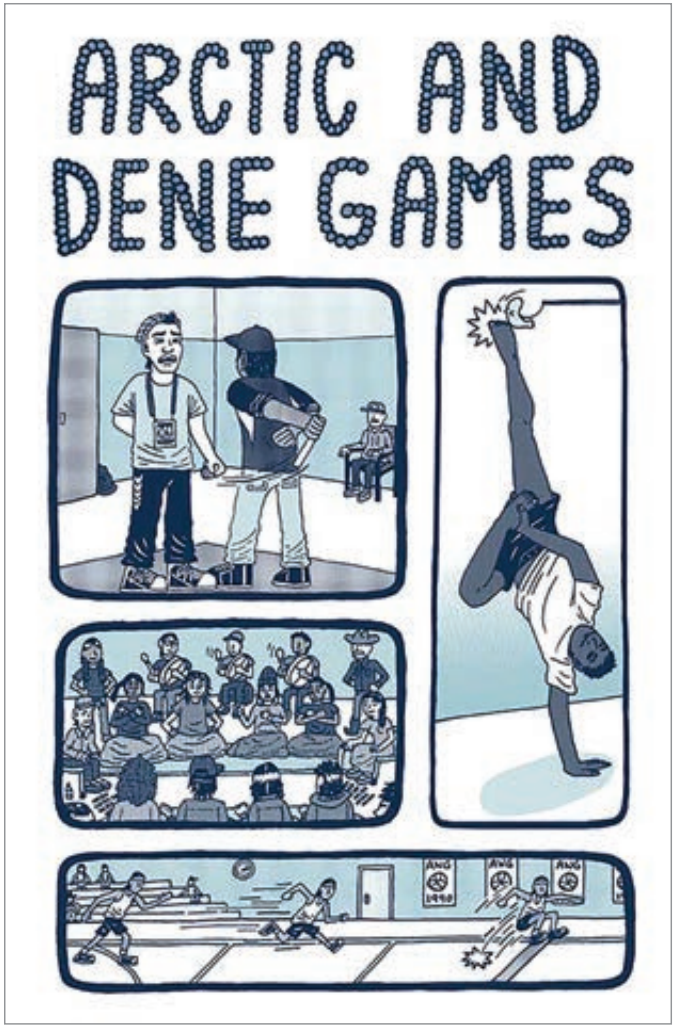
SKINS
2011
BIRCH BARK, ZIPPERS, PINS,
LACE, PULLEYS, ROPE, BRICKS

PORCUPINE CORSET
2021
BIRCH BARK, LACE, HARDWARE,
PORCUPINE QUILLS
24"x16"x16"

COLE PAULS

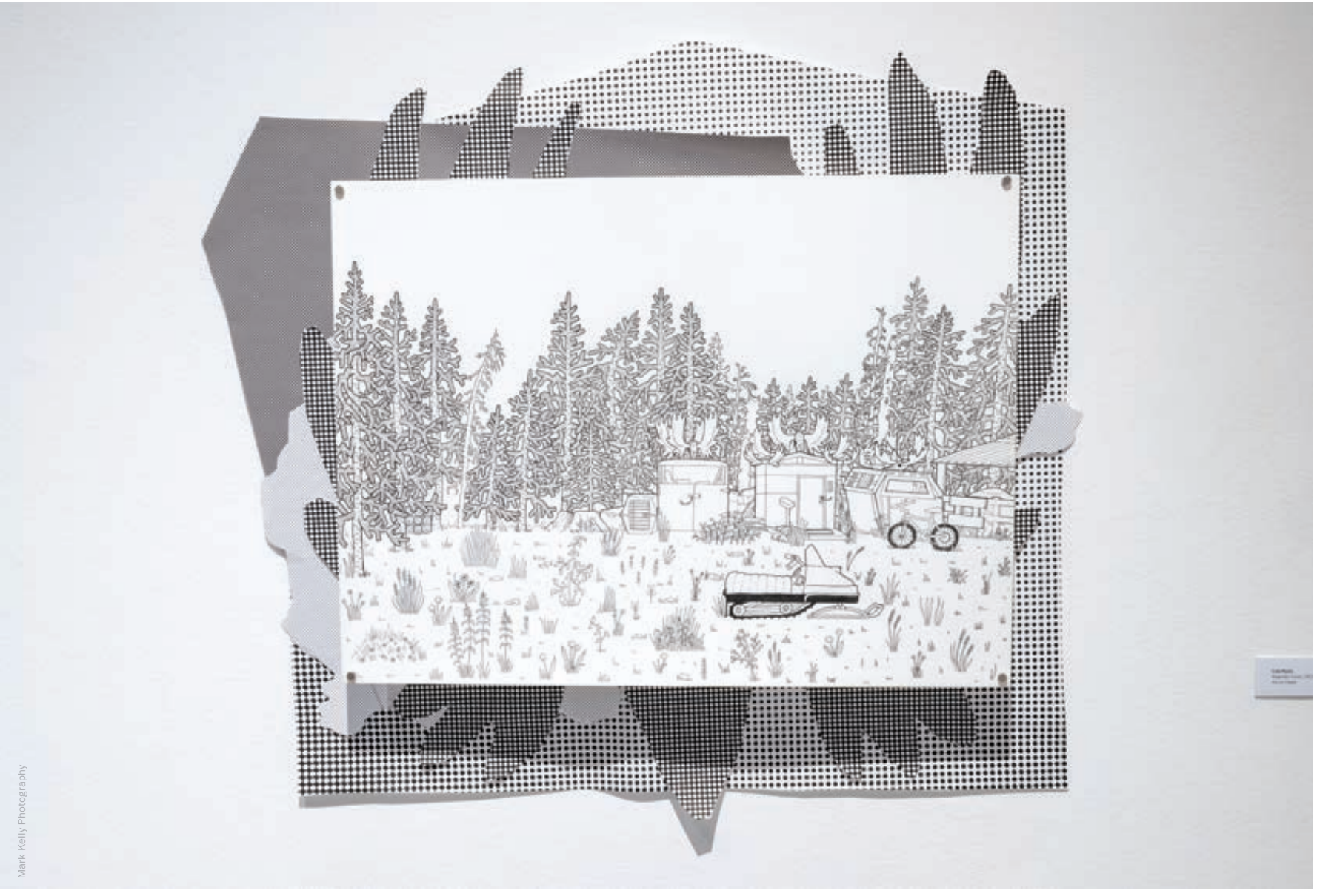
Cole Pauls is a Champagne and Aishihik First Nations citizen and Tahltan comic artist, illustrator, and printmaker from Haines Junction. He now lives in Vancouver and holds a BFA in illustration from Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

Growing up in Haines Junction, Pauls always looked for northern representation in comics, video games, and media to see himself in the world. But he was never happy with the representation he saw—he always thought it didn't have enough truth or was completely wrong. At a very young age, Pauls decided he could tell his own truths and northern stories through comics and sequential storytelling. He wants to create the comics he always wanted to read as a kid. Through his comics, Pauls wants northern children and Yukon First Nations to see themselves and think, *This is a true depiction of what life is like here, what sports are like here, what the weather is like here, who lives here, and why we call this place home.*



ARCTIC AND DENE GAMES
2022
INK AND PAPER
16 PAGES, 8.5"x13"

PERMANENT REGALIA
2021
INK ON PAPER
FOUR PAGES, 8.5"x13"

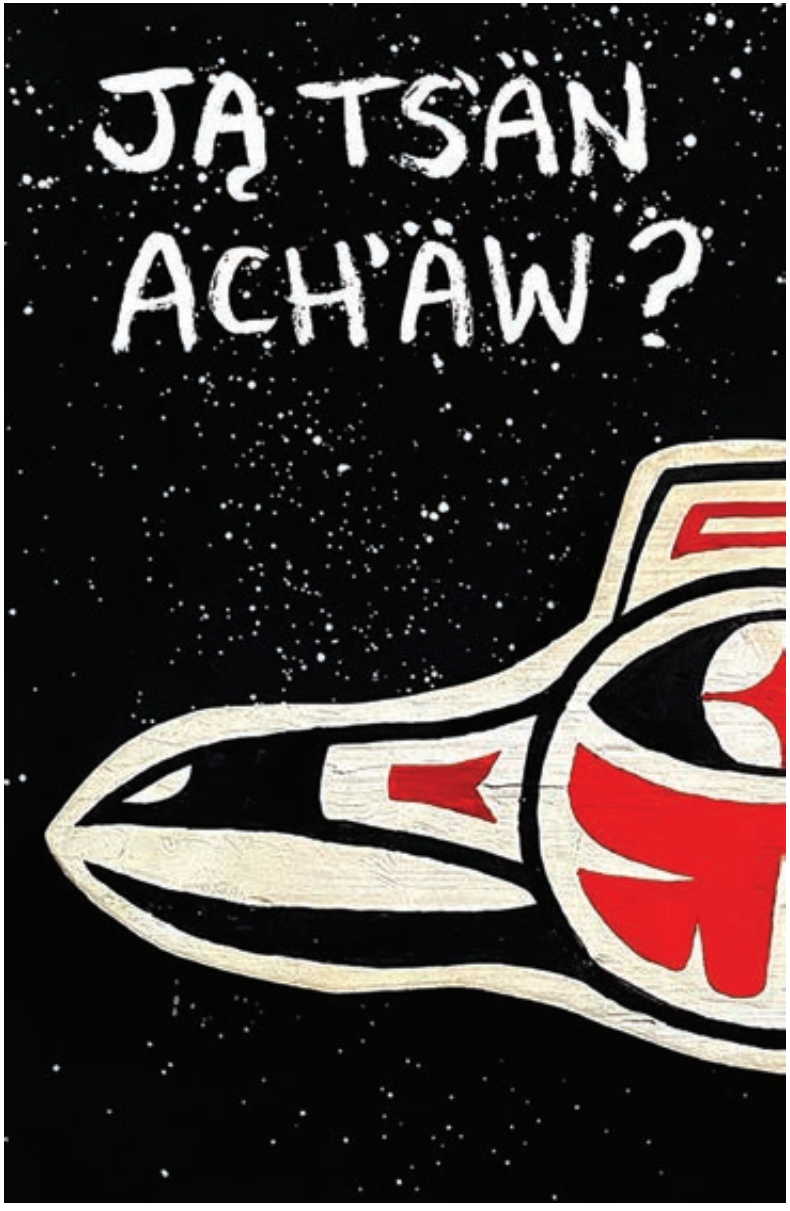


Mark Kelly Photography

KWÄNDÜR
2021
INK ON PAPER, 18"x4"

A lot of [Indigenous] stories are traditionally told orally, and they're told around a campfire, and every once in a while, someone will create a piece of art that represents that story. So in our culture, you see a lot of masks that are depictions of legends, and they encapsulate the whole story in one mask. With comics, it's another thing like that, where I can depict my own culture's stories, where I illustrate them in a culturally accurate way. And I can tell them through our own eyes, and through our own voices—just like oral tradition except it's written down.

”



JA TSÄN ACH'ÄW? (WHERE IS HE FROM?)
2022
INK ON PAPER
EIGHT PAGES, 8.5"x13"

OMAR REYNA

Omar Reyna was born in Mexico City and now lives in Whitehorse. He has studied visual communication, photography, sculpture, painting, and the philosophy of image.

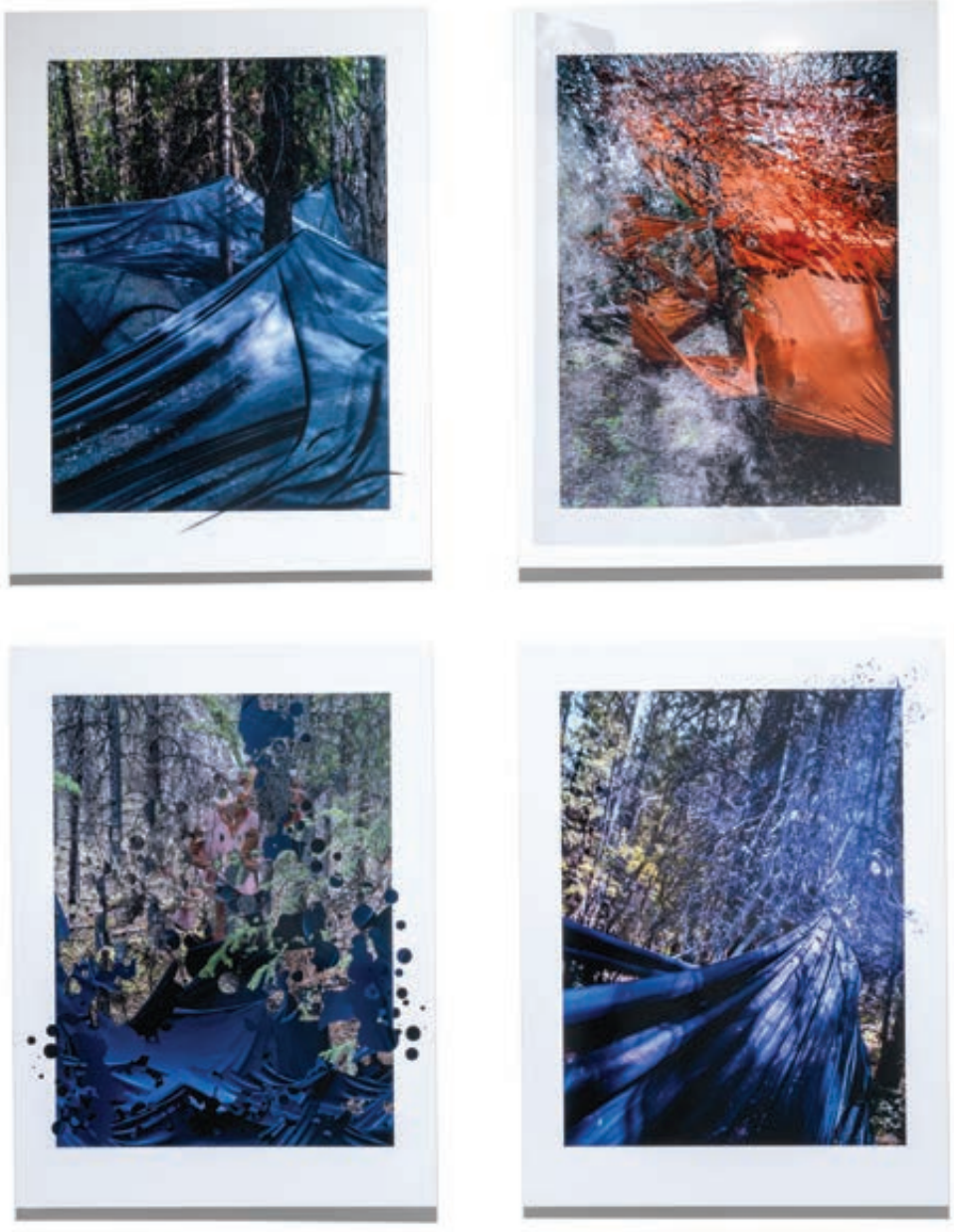
Reyna produces projects with a wide range of media—he views his work as a wrapping art form to create a unified and highly manipulated output. For him, making while experimenting is a form of physical thinking.

Reyna regards his art practice as an act of contriving worlds beyond the visible, between the real and the imagined. He works in between photography and the physical manipulation of objects and materials, aiming to trigger events and actions that connect, disturb, and question what we perceive. His approach is much cerebral as a physical engagement.

Research and reflection are a big part of Reyna's process, but he also thinks, articulates, and conceptualizes through the activity of making. He believes that holding the photographic camera and moving with it can be—besides a physical act of beautiful complexity—a philosophical, poetic, and violent gesture. Many of his art-making processes rely on an unfocused mind, where he makes progress while eluding direct thinking.

Reyna's artwork has been exhibited in Hungary, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Argentina, South Korea, and Italy.

TURBULENCE IS A STATE OF BEING
2022
ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT
15"x20" IMAGE, 17"x22" PAPER



Mark Kelly Photography

AN OCEAN ROAMING THROUGH THE FOREST
2022–23
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)

NOTHING TO AVOID
FURTHER INTO THE FLAMES
FLUX AND TRANSFORMATION
HESITATION

Omar Reyna

WE CAME ONLY TO DREAM
2021
BLACK AND WHITE FILM PHOTOGRAPHY,
PIEZOGRAPHY PRINT ON COTTON PAPER.
EACH PHOTO: 16"x20" IMAGE, 17"x22" PAPER

Most of my work I do in the forest. I consider it my expanded studio. In some way, the forest provides me with everything that I need for my photography.

”

POSSESSED
2023
WATERCOLOUR, MIXED MEDIA ON COTTON PAPER
9¾"x13¾" IMAGE, 12"x16" PAPER

TAMING YOURSELF
2023
WATERCOLOUR, MIXED MEDIA ON COTTON PAPER
9¾"x13¾" IMAGE, 12"x16" PAPER

A PURELY MENTAL EVENT
2023
WATERCOLOUR, MIXED MEDIA ON COTTON PAPER
9¾"x13¾" IMAGE, 12"x16" PAPER

Omar Reyna

Omar Reyna

Omar Reyna

ALAINNAH WHACHELL

Alainnah Whachell grew up and currently resides in the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council in Whitehorse. She is of mixed British, Czech, and Red River Métis descent, and has a BFA from Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

Whachell works within the discipline of sculpture, making tactile work that reveals an exuberant relationship to materiality and process. Major themes in her work are semiotics, fetish, time, desire, and capitalism's inescapable and dramatic influence on them all.

Through her rasterized representations of screenshots from fashion websites, Whachell uses beads to translate and deconstruct each pixel, memorializing the digital image of the ephemeral fashion compulsion.

With these works, Whachell explores how desire is not innate but rather motivated by carefully constructed signifiers within a capitalist structure.

GANNI
2019
SEED BEADS, NYLON THREAD, WALNUT

Mark Kelly Photography

ADD TO BAG
2015
SEED BEADS, NYLON THREAD, WALNUT

Mark Kelly Photography

R. COMEY
2019–2023
SEED BEADS, MIYUKI DELICA BEADS, FILAMENT, SCREEN, WALNUT, BRASS SCREWS

Mark Kelly Photography

P. WOOL
2020
MIYUKI SEED BEADS, NYLON THREAD, WALNUT, CORK

Mark Kelly Photography

PALOMA W.
2020
SEED BEADS, NYLON THREAD, WALNUT, CORK

Mark Kelly Photography

My number one favourite thing about making work in the Yukon—and this is probably tied to my situation—is the sunlight. I can get off work and then have a really good chunk of time to be in the studio before it gets dark at night. I love the midnight sun. I love having a lot of energy in the summertime. I love how beautiful it is up here, how you can really sink into a project and be without distractions.

”

VALENTINO CODE TEMPORAL
2023
MYUKI DELICA BEADS, NYLON THREAD, WALNUT, BRASS SCREWS

KAYLYN BAKER

JEFFREY LANGILLE

REBEKAH MILLER

COLE PAULS

OMAR REYNA

ALAINNAH WHACHELL

YUKON PRIZE
for visual arts

GRATITUDE

We are grateful for the warm welcome from the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council on whose traditional territory we live and create.

We are grateful for the incredibly talented Yukon artists whose work enriches our lives and for the supportive arts community which makes the Yukon such a great place to live.

We are grateful to these organizations and individuals whose support has made the 2023 Yukon Prize for Visual Arts possible.

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GUIDE TO GALLERIES + MUSEUMS PREVIEW

Tim Hortons

what's UP YUKON All Northern. All Fun.

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(Ddhälh kït Nelnah)
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And the many volunteers who helped us
with the Yukon Prize Weekend events

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Many thanks to the 19 Whitehorse Art Crawl locations!

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Exhibition catalogue: Rhiannon Russell (writer and editor); Mary Binsted (designer)
Catalogue photography: Mike Thomas (Yukon Arts Centre) and Mark Kelly and the artists

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