Yukon Prize For Visual Arts 2025 finalists announced

Six finalists, drawn from a pool of 60 applicants will have their work shown

Jim Elliot
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Yukon Prize For Visual Arts finalists from top row left to right: Jeneen Frei Njootli, Jane Isakson, Meshell Melvin, (bottom row left to right) Randi Nelson, Aubyn O'Grady, Jackie Olson. (Images Submitted)

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A list of 60 Yukon Artists hoping for the Yukon Prize For Visual Arts has been whittled down to six finalists announced March 31.

Up for the prize valued at $20,000 are Jane Isakson of Whitehorse, Meshell Melvin of Whitehorse, Randi Nelson a Secwépemc artist from St'uxtéws First Nation in British Columbia who resides in Whitehorse, Jeneen Frei Njootli a Vuntut Gwitchin artist from Old Crow, Aubyn O'Grady from Dawson and Jackie Olson from the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation in Dawson.

An artist statement posted to the Yukon Prize website by Isakson describes a painting practice in which she uses nature and landscapes as a way of understanding her place in the world. Recently-completed work by Isakson is inspired by an artist residency on a sailing ship visiting the Arctic Island of Svalbard.

Melvin works in textiles creating images drawn from the landscapes, people and experiences she is familiar with using embroidery. Her artist statement notes that she uses an industrial chain-stitch embroiderer with a design dating back to the 1860s.

Nelson's work aims to blend Indigenous materials with contemporary fashion. Smoked hides, quills, shells and caribou hair are all in use on her designs that have graced runways and red carpets around the world.

Frei Njootli works in a variety of artistic disciplines with some of the works submitted for the prize rendering flowers with epoxy on steel.

O'Grady's submitted works include soundscapes, some with accompanying art, fabric banners, a short film and works associated with the Dawson City League of Lady Wrestlers.

Olson's work deals with the process of reclamation and regrowth in the wake of land's destruction at the surface by mining. For this reason, according to her artist's statement, her sculpture work makes use of willow as it is the first thing to overgrow machinery and rubble.

The finalists were chosen from among the many entrants by a jury of three arts professionals from outside the Yukon. The jury was made up of Jean-François Bélisle, the director and CEO of the National Gallery of Canada, Sarah Moore Fillmore, CEO of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and Heather Igloliorte, a professor in the University of Victoria visual arts department.

Yukoners will have a chance to see works from all six finalists in a curated group exhibition shown in the Yukon Arts Centre Gallery in Whitehorse that is set to open Sept. 11. The winner of the prize will be announced during the Yukon Prize Festival Weekend.

The finalists will be included in a curated group exhibition in Whitehorse at the Yukon Arts Centre Gallery, opening on Sept. 11. The recipient of the $20,000 Yukon Prize will be selected during the Yukon Prize Festival Weekend, taking place Oct. 3-5, 2025.

"This art-filled weekend will be open to the public, with most events being free to attend. The highlight of the festival will be the Yukon Prize Celebration Evening on Saturday October 4, a ticketed event celebrating the finalists and the announcement of the prize recipient," the March 31 finalist announcement reads.

Tickets for that event go on sale April 15 via the Yukon Arts Centre's box office.

The Yukon Prize for Visual Arts is awarded every two years. The 2025 award will be the third time it has been given with past prizes going to Joseph Tisiga in 2021 and Kaylyn Baker in 2023. The finalist announcement notes that while the prize winner takes home the $20,000 the other five finalists will each receive $3,000.

Contact Jim Elliot at jim.elliot@yukon-news.com