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Pitching in: Bringing more attention to Yukon-based artists

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Jackie Olson, a 2025 Yukon Prize finalist, talks about her artwork at the Finalists' Exhibition at the Yukon Arts Centre Gallery in October.

The organizers: Julie Jai and David Trick

The pitch: Co-founding the Yukon Prize for Visual Arts

It didn't take long for Toronto lawyer Julie Jai to fall in love with Yukon after she moved to Whitehorse in 1996 with her husband David Trick.

She'd been hired by the Yukon government to assist with negotiations on Indigenous land claims, and quickly became captivated by the territory's natural beauty, its people and their culture.

After spending six years helping settle 11 of 14 claims, Ms. Jai and Mr. Trick continued to travel to Whitehorse regularly from their home in Toronto.

“I really was getting into art and art appreciation, and starting to collect art,” Ms. Jai said.
She was always struck that people she knew in the Toronto art world couldn’t name a single Yukon artist. “And then I go back to Yukon and just see this incredible talent and think, ‘Wow, it’s like a treasure box that nobody has really opened the lid on.’”

To bring more attention to Yukon artists, Ms. Jai and Mr. Trick launched the Yukon Prize for Visual Arts in 2021. The biennial award honours top talent working in a variety of mediums; including photographers, sound artists, textile artists, sculptors and painters.

Each award – in 2021, 2023 and 2025 – attracted around 70 entries, and a panel of three expert judges from outside Yukon selected six finalists. Works of the finalists were displayed at the Yukon Art Centre during a gala weekend. The winner received $20,000 and the five finalists $3,000 each.

The 2025 recipient was Aubyn O’Grady, who won for her innovative performance projects, including one called the Dawson City League of Lady Wrestlers. “She does a lot of community involved artworks that really are engaging and involving people,” said Ms. Jai.

The couple raise around $200,000 to fund each prize and related events. And planning for the 2027 award is under way.

“Starting it was a leap of faith,” said Ms. Jai, who has retired from legal practice. “There’s really become quite a groundswell of support for the prize, both within the Yukon and outside the Yukon, and that’s what we really wanted to do. We wanted to increase the opportunities for Yukon art to be seen by people from outside.”