

Celebrating Yukon art

Yukon Prize gala and Air North Art Crawl showcase artists' talent

Ever since Julie Jai moved to the Yukon, in 1996, she's been impressed by the talent of local artists.

Splitting her time between Whitehorse and Toronto over the years, she realized that art lovers and collectors in the Ontario capital didn't know anything about Yukon work, often mixing up Whitehorse with Yellowknife and assuming Inuit art was the only type of northern art.

Jai wanted to get the word out that Yukon art is exceptional and diverse.

"Whitehorse has the highest percentage of artists per capita of any city in Canada, but it's a very small art market," she says. "Almost every Yukoner I know has the work of local artists in their home, but our population isn't big enough to support all the artists we have here."



(ABOVE) A 2019 tapestry by Krystle Silverfox entitled *All that Glitters is not Gold...*

(LEFT) Julie Jai.
PHOTOS: MARK KELLY

Local artists Jai knew were often working full-time jobs, doing their creative work on the side.

Then she heard a radio interview with Toronto writer Camilla Gibb, who had been working to pay off student debt and writing in her spare time when she met a man who gifted her \$6,000—no strings attached—and told her to go write.

Gibb quit her job, moved into her brother's trailer, and wrote a novel. Now, the award-winning author writes for a living.

"I still feel emotional when I talk about this," says Jai, tearing up. "It changed her life. It made me think, *Wow, if I could do this for somebody, it would just be so amazing.*"

In 2021, the Yukon Prize for Visual Arts was born, co-founded by Jai and her husband, David Trick. The biennial prize provides \$20,000 to one Yukon artist to help them focus on their creative endeavours. Five other finalists receive \$3,000 each.

"One of our goals is to really put the Yukon on the map in the art world and give Yukon artists more opportunities," Jai says.

This year, the prize will be awarded on Sept. 16 at a gala in Whitehorse. The six shortlisted finalists are Kaylyn Baker, a Selkirk First Nation citizen residing in Whitehorse; Jeffrey Langille, from Dawson City; Rebekah Miller, from Dawson City; Cole Pauls, a Tahltan and Champagne and Aishihik First Nations citizen living in Vancouver; Omar Reyna, from Whitehorse; and Alannah Wachell of Whitehorse.

The gala is part of an arts celebration that lasts all weekend, kicking off with an exhibition of the finalists' work at the Yukon Arts Centre on Sept. 14.

On Sept. 15, Air North, Yukon's Airline is presenting a free art crawl in downtown Whitehorse. Studios, stores, galleries, and arts organizations will open their doors to the public, providing an opportunity for Yukon residents and visitors to explore and connect with the creative community.

The self-guided tour includes Arts Underground, Yukon Artists at Work, and many other locations. Several venues will offer refreshments, and attendees can also enter a draw for a free Air North flight.

(BELOW) A child and parent admire a mask that forms part of a 2021 installation by Ken Anderson entitled *What we had what we have what we take what we are given where we are where we are going who we were who we are who we will be what we have lost and what we have found thanks no thanks; gunalthcheesh da ki en cow.*

PHOTO: MARK KELLY



"Really good art invites conversation," Jai says. "Having something like an art crawl gives people an opportunity to talk with artists, have conversations about art, and enjoy the breadth of talent that we have here."

Throughout the weekend, artist talks and panel discussions will also be happening at the Yukon Arts Centre.

In the years to come, the goal is making this weekend-long arts celebration an attraction for people all over Canada.

"We want to get the word out about how much talent there is in the territory and connect artists more with the world of art collectors, curators, and art appreciators—and even tourists who come to the Yukon thinking they're coming for fishing or hiking, but maybe don't know that we've got a really active arts community," Jai says.

To learn more about the weekend's events, visit the Yukon Prize's website (yukonprize.ca). Follow on Instagram (@yukonprize) for further details on participating locations for the Air North Art Crawl and up-to-date information on events.

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