

THE YUKON PRIZE FOR VISUAL ARTS

Uncovering the Vibrant Artistic Community of the Yukon

The Yukon is renowned for its spectacular vistas, gorgeous wildlife, and abundance of outdoor activities. But while dazzling sights such as the midnight sun and the northern lights have captured the hearts of travellers around the world, one of the Yukon's most incredible qualities is its world-recognized artists – yet many Canadians have yet to discover these incredible artists and art scene that shapes the Yukon.



An authentic arts incubator, the Yukon houses a diverse community of visual artists and has the highest concentration of visual artists in the country. Art is truly rooted in the region's DNA. And while there is a long way to go, the Yukon's art scene is leading the way with respect to diversity in artists.

Eleven out of fourteen Yukon First Nations are self-governing. Settling the land claims has contributed to cultural revitalization and improved the quality of life in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Many Indigenous artists are preserving past artistic traditions while also using their art to educate, heal, tell stories and start conversations.

"Every Yukon vacation should include a

stop at an artists' studio, gallery or festival," said Ranj Pillai, Minister of Tourism and Culture. "There is something special in the water up here that both inspires and gives birth to incredible artists who are producing world class works across many mediums that will truly surprise our visitors."

Visitors to the Yukon will find themselves face-to-face with the quality and richness of Yukon art, featuring pieces that reflect the values of the North.

INTRODUCING THE WORLD TO YUKON ARTISTS

When Julie Jai and David Trick first found a life and community in the Yukon, they were impressed with the quality and diversity of the visual arts – but noticed that Yukon

art was less recognized than some of its northern neighbours. Through the Yukon's Touring Artist Fund which supports Yukon artists touring their work with exhibits across Canada and internationally, the incredibly talented artists of the Yukon have started to get the recognition they deserve. Knowing how important these artists and their stories are to Canada's cultural narrative, Jai and Trick wanted to further elevate the work already being done.

The Yukon Prize for Visual Arts was born – a biennial award that recognizes excellence by Yukon artists, providing \$20,000 to one of the six finalists to help them focus full-time on creating art.

The Yukon 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. Eligible artworks included painting, carving, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, electronic media, photography, textiles, glass, regalia, jewellery and drawing.

This privately-sponsored opportunity is in addition to over \$4 million dollars in public arts funding support available annually from the Government of Yukon in support of Yukon arts. The myriad of funding programs for Yukon artists are always fully-subscribed, and include opportunities for Yukon artists to tour their art nationally art internationally.

Jai and Trick hope to support Yukon artists in pursuing their craft, while encouraging Yukoners and those who live outside the Yukon to learn about and appreciate Yukon art.

THE FINALISTS

With a population of 43,000 people in Yukon, 107 artists submitted their work. Applications came from Whitehorse, Dawson City and more than half of the Yukon's 17 other communities. Yukon First Nations were well represented.

The finalists for the first-ever Yukon prize were chosen by a panel of three internationally-recognized art professionals and curators: Ryan Doherty, chief curator of Contemporary Calgary; Candice Hopkins, an independent curator, writer and researcher, and Gaëtane Verna, director of The Power Plant Art Gallery in Toronto.

THE SIX FINALISTS FOR THE YUKON PRIZE FOR VISUAL ARTS ARE:

Ken Anderson (KHĀTINAS.ĀXH) – Born in Whitehorse, Anderson is of Tlingit and Scandinavian ancestry. A largely self-taught artist, he works in a traditional Tlingit style, using a range of media, including wood, metal, stone and snow. Tlingit family and traditions are the foundations of the art he practices, and Anderson strongly believes artists should respect the legacy they carry.

Sho Sho “Belelige” Esquiro – Esquiro grew up in the Yukon, and is of Kaska Dena, Cree and Scottish heritage. She fuses contemporary and traditional techniques to create textiles that have been featured in museums around North America. She feels a profound sense of responsibility to use her platform and work to address Indigenous issues and healing.

A member of the Kaska Dena Nation, **Joseph Tisiga**'s multidisciplinary practice is rooted in painting and drawing, and includes performance, photography, sculpture and installation. His work reflects upon notions of identity and what contributes to this construct - community, nationality, family, history, location, real and imagined memories – questions that have become all the more relevant in the current climate.



Veronica Verkley is a sculptor and media artist based near Dawson City Yukon, on the traditional territory of the Trondëk Hwëch'in. Her choice to live in the bush facilitates the observational practice that informs her work. Verkley scours the landscape for materials (bed sheets, hoses, cast-offs) to be used in creating flexible forms, often built around the gestures of animals and centred on their resilience.

Krystle Silverfox is a member of Selkirk First Nation (Wolf Clan), and an interdisciplinary visual artist. Her artistic practice explores different materials, methodologies and symbols to create conceptual works. Silverfox is inspired by Indigenous feminism, trans-nationalism, decolonialism, activism and lived experience.

Amy Ball's artistic practice takes a critical and insightful look at the social architectures that shape the way we live. Writing is a fundamental part of her practice; her narrative and persuasive essays inspire her installations, short films, performances, and two and three-dimensional works. She works in a variety of mediums.

THE FUTURE OF YUKON ART

On November 20, the first Yukon Prize winner will be announced at a celebratory event in Whitehorse, and there are plans for the finalists' art to travel outside Whitehorse in the future.

But this is just the beginning. Over 100 Yukon artists applied for the inaugural prize – an indication of the abundance of talent, much yet to be uncovered. It's only a matter of time before Yukon artists are more widely recognized as an important part of Canada's rich cultural narrative, and the Yukon is recognized for what it truly is, a northern incubator of art.

