

An Open Book

CAFTCAD LIBRARY COMMITTEE

A STORY IS SEWN IN:

FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT ARTISANS AND CLOTHING DESIGNERS SHARE INSIGHT ABOUT THEIR CREATIVE JOURNEYS

By Isabel Bloor (Editor and Writer), Mariana Sandoval-Angel (Layout Editor), Rhonda Lucy and Athena Theyn (Consulting Guest Editors).

Each day when you reach into the closet, you consider what to take off the hanger. You will have made deliberate choices about what is hanging in that closet so that it reflects something about you: your sense of self and a connection to your cultural traditions, spiritual history or ancestral knowledge. When that kind of reflection is linked to skills of making or designing, a bit more of who you are gets embedded into that piece you create and wear.

For part one of this two part blog series, we have invited KungK_ayangas / Marlene Liddle and Tlaa'KwaHul'puulth / Carmen Thompson to share their perspectives about the storytelling that is sewn into their artistic endeavours.

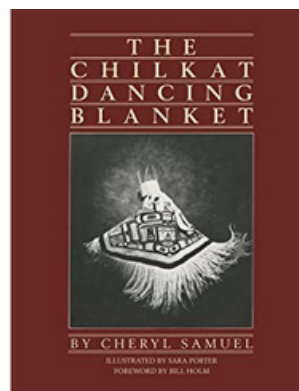
How did your creative journey develop?

Marlene: Traditionally. I began by starting with the first steps by learning how to identify a good tree to harvest bark from. I spent 7 years in my 30's learning the identification, the actual harvest and the various stages of bark preparation. These first years all my harvest and prep went to my mentors and elders for their use for weaving hats and baskets.



Hat made by Marlene Liddle in magnificent cedar weaving. Picture provided by Marlene Liddle.

Marlene started her apprenticeship with the gathering, and preparation of cedar bark in 2000, with her friends and mentors Barney Edgars, Darren Edgars and Rolly Williams. She gathered and prepared the bark for her elder aunts, cousins, and fellow weavers until the summer of 2008. In August of 2008 her mentor and teacher Christine Carty (Master Weaver) offered to teach her how to weave. Marlene worked with Christine Carty and fellow students for an entire year. Together they learned the basics of weaving, while enjoying each others' stories and company.



Marlene recommends *The Chilkat Dancing Blanket* by Cheryl Samuel as a great book with historical knowledge and some instructions.

"I make first with respect, and then with the integrity of the story and culture being represented."

Marlene Liddle

Carmen: I started drawing very young, so my illustration skills are pretty decent. My first costume recreation was Michael Jackson's sequin glove when I was 10. I started background acting when I was 13 and moved into acting at 18. I then moved into the costume department as costume designer & costume builder in 2004. Now I am also moving into writing and producing. I'm a filmmaker through and through.

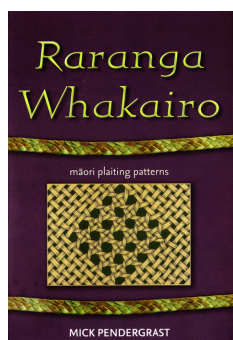
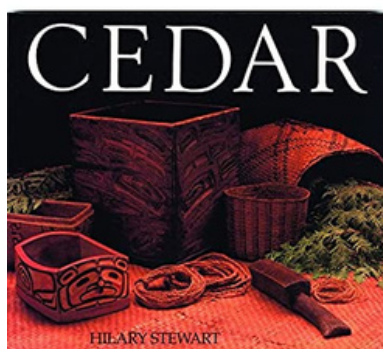
In 2020, Carmen joined as an Associate Producer and Costume Designer for the short film *Kiri and the Girl*. Carmen's next project (currently in production) will be as a producer on *Forbidden Music*, a historical docu-drama feature about a Jewish holocaust survivor who recorded the music of First Nations knowledge keepers in Canada in the 1940s. She is also writing a television series, featuring Trickster, Sasquatch, Wild Woman.

“Fashion was not created in the haute couture showrooms of Paris, or by a small group of European designers privileging white, thin bodies. Hand-made clothing has been part of most cultures pre-dating the industrial revolution.”¹ Carmen Thompson.

Do you have a project you've made or designed that has a special connection for you?

Marlene: Every piece I create has a special connection for me. Each one is a visual pleasure to watch them slowly morph into a hat. The creation part of each hat plays a major part in my life. This is due to the teachings we receive as we are learning to weave. You must be of good body, mind and soul when you are working with cedar bark any negativity will show in your work. The Haida believe that the cedar tree is our sister and we must always be thankful to her for gifting us a part of her for our use in our creations /weavings.

Cedar: *Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians* by Hilary Stewart, is by far my favourite book that shows all the various uses that cedar was used for. Some techniques in there, as well as diagrams of some of the tools used for weaving and carving.



Left to right: 1. Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians by Hilary Stewart. 2. Raranga Whakairo: Maori plaiting patterns by Mick Pendergras.

Carmen: *Bones of Crows*. This project has a piece of my heart and soul. To be a part of the team to create this production is an honour. I know I was there not only as the lead Costume Designer, but I was there to support the telling of the story properly. Marie Clements heard me when I had very strict costume design restrictions, and Production heard me with the Indian Residential School storyline. I am proud to be a part of the cultural storytelling this production demanded.



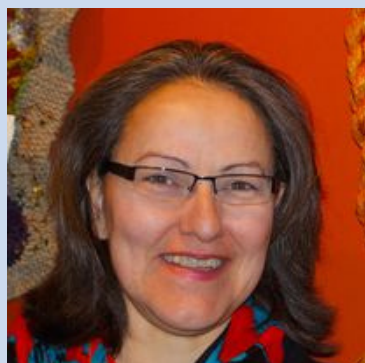
Clockwise: 1. *Bones of Crows* Official Poster. 2. 0507 Day 1: *Bones of Crow*. The cast and crew on set in Kamloops. Picture provided by Carmen Thompson. 3. 0549 - *Bones of Crow* the "starving Cree" scene background performers and the blue screen. Picture Provided by Carmen Thompson

Would you like to share if there are any design elements, or materials or sewing techniques you resonate with that you like to include in items you create?

Marlene: I stepped out of the "traditional" lane about 2009-2010 and into the "contemporary" lane when I started adding metallic materials as embellishments to my weaving. I use 23karat gold leaf, copper and other coloured metallic materials. I also use waxed Irish Linen cord on fedora hats for the hat band, incorporating various colours and patterns in a style like Raven's Tail weaving. While my weaving techniques remain traditional it is those embellishments that make my weavings signature pieces that are easily recognizable at potlatches and feasts.

Raranga Whakairo: Maori plaiting patterns by Mick Pendergras, is a great source for various pattern work because you can use any material and weave these patterns.

Footnote: 1. <https://thisispublicparking.com/posts/in-conversation-with-indigenous-costume-designer-carmen-thompson>



Kung K_ayangas / Marlene Liddle was born on Haida Gwaii, British Columbia and currently resides in Masset. She is Haida of the Yahgulanaas Clan, Raven moiety. She is from a long line of renowned Haida artists and carvers, including

her great-grand parents Isabella (Master Weaver), Charles Edenshaw (Master Carver), her grand mother Agnes Jones (Cedar Bark Weaver), her mother Norma Adams (Cedar Bark Weaver), her sister Georgia Bennett (Raven's Tail and Chilkat Weaver), her daughter Cori Savard (Carver, Artist), and her son Chad Savard (Digital/Computer Guru).

In 2013 she was a recipient of the BC Creative Achievement Award First Nations' Art for her cedar bark weaving. Her weaving contributions can be seen in the 2019 CAFTCAD Best Costume Design Award in Low Budget awarded to Sgawaay K'uuna - The Edge of the Knife. In 2020 Marlene was a recipient of the SHI (Sealaska Heritage Institute) Awards for Best of Endangered Art Division for "Small Spruce Root Basket", and also awarded the Best of Basketry Category and Best of Weaving Division for "Imitation Abalone"

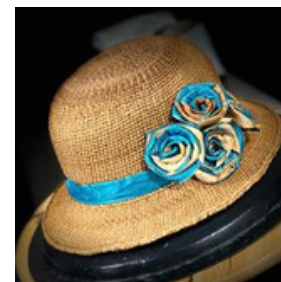


Tlaa'kwa Hul'puulth / Carmen Thompson is Diitidaht/Kyuquot/Coast Salish. She has been designing and building costumes for theatre, television, music videos and feature films for more than 20 years and has over 60 credits to her name.

Most recently, she won the 2023 CAFTCAD Award for Costume Design in Film-Period for Marie Clement's feature film, *Bones of Crows*. In 2022 she won the CAFTCAD Award for *Kiri and the Girl* Costume Design, Short Film. She has garnered a Leo Nomination for Best Costume Design in a Motion Picture for Marie Clement's *Red Snow* (2019), and Best Costume Design in a Short Drama for her work on *Matthew Blecha's Super Bingo* (2018).

Carmen is now moving toward writing and producing. In 2022, she attended the Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity and completed the Indigenous Screenwriting Residency Program. In 2019, she was accepted into the Women in Film & TV, Tricksters & Writers Program.

tlakwadesigns.com



Marlene has now woven over 270 large pieces, with the greater majority of those being traditional Haida style hats using red and yellow cedar with some embellishments. Shown here are different styles hats but the same technique. Pictures provided by Marlene Liddle.

Carmen: I love trying to add my father, Art Thompson's (Diitidaht/Coast Salish) silver jewelry into my costumes if I can. I suppose it goes further, I try to add my family and my culture somehow in my work. My youngest sister, Evelyn Thompson-George, is a beader, and I have commissioned her and I have purchased pieces from her. Even if the overall production isn't Indigenous, I try to add a dash somehow somewhere. If it works, it works.



Clockwise: 1. Bracelet of Art Thompson. 2 Actress Isla Grant wearing custom Indigenous designed vest by Carmen Thompson, Carmen's sisters barrette, and the custom made beaded choker by Writer / Producer Kiri Geen. 3. Actors Barbara Patrick, Tahmoh Pinkett and Isla Grant. Tahmoh wearing the bracelet by Carmen's father, Isla wearing a beaded barrette by Evelyn Thompson-George, costumes designed by Carmen. Pictures provided by Carmen Thompson

Carmen's father, the late Art Thompson Diitidaht/Coast Salish, was a renowned First Nations carver and painter and he inspired her to combine both her cultural background and technical training in her work. Her mother, the late Cathy Leo (Kyuquot), raised Carmen to pursue a career in the arts.²

Footnote: 2. <http://tlakwadesigns.com/about/>

When non-indigenous people view your created pieces, what kind of connection or insight would you wish for them to receive?

Carmen: When telling an Indigenous story through costume, I do my best to create each Indigenous costume I make, first with respect and then with the integrity of the story and culture being represented. When I am working as an Indigenous Costume Designer, I feel it's more of a heavier position than Costume Designer. I bring a cultural story to my pieces. A cultural weight is added to the character and I take pride in that and if the storyline is Indigenous, I believe it's a necessary and extremely important element to have in the overall Production.

Carmen took this perspective into her work as “the Costume Designer for the international TV series, *1491: The Untold Story of the Americas Before Columbus* (2017), which involved designing more than 150 historic costumes representing different Indigenous nations such as Amazonian, Anishnaabe, Inuit, Aztec, Maya, Blackfoot, Cahokia, Cree, Inca, Iroquois, Kwagwiltz, Nuuchahnulth and Pueblo.”³



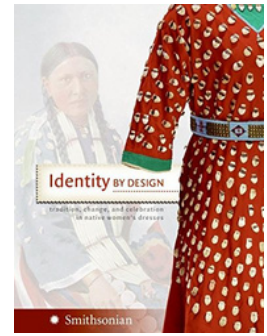
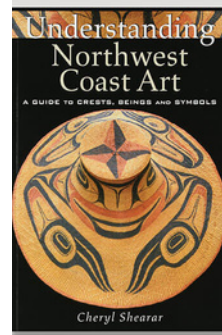
The Power of Style

Style is not just the clothes on our backs—it is self-expression,...

books.google.com

Marlene: I wish that they don't just see a hat or a basket or think that these pieces are “trinkets”. Every piece is meant to be worn. And the work that goes into each piece even before the weaving begins, is a huge piece that many are not aware of.

There is scouting for the right tree (quality tree = quality bark = quality weaving), the many stages of preparing the bark for weaving, and finally the weaving. Typically for me to weave a hat takes 3-4 weeks. When you factor in all the harvesting and prepping the total hours per hat ends up being 100-120 hours dedicated to creating each unique piece.

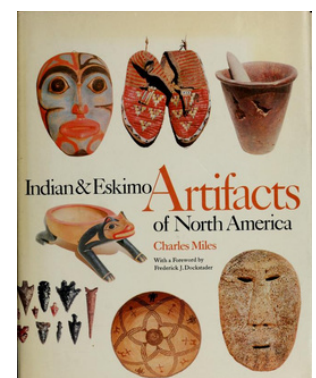


Left to right: *Understanding Northwest Coast Art: A Guide to Crests, Beings, and Symbols* by Cheryl Shearer (2000). *Identity by Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women's Dresses* by Smithsonian

What do you want costume teams to know when approaching and connecting to indigenous cultural garments - whether that be everyday worn items or regalia pieces?

Marlene: The pieces are most likely family pieces that have history. Typically a regalia piece has a crest that identifies that person as belonging to a specific clan. The regalia is sort of a part of a living family tree. Most, if on loan, would be priceless to the person who loaned it and irreplaceable.

Carmen: Research, research, research. Hit the library, make phone calls, ask questions! If you receive a script, as the Costume Designer, you can ask if there was an Indigenous Consultant to ensure cultural accuracy and you as the Designer can hire an Indigenous Consultant to ensure you are designing appropriate costumes. As a costume builder you can ask the same to your Designer to make sure what they are asking you to build is culturally accurate. Mainly, before you start, no matter what job in the costume department, if there is an Indigenous component, you **HAVE** to ask if the Indigenous costume is appropriate.



Left to Right: 1. *Hall of the North American Indian*. Peabody Museum and Harvard University. 2. *Indian and Eskimo Artifacts of North America*. Charles Miles. Recommendations from Carmen Thompson

The "reciprocal and respectful relationship between humans and nature is important in understanding Indigenous relationships with their traditional dress. Clothing has its own energy and is a symbol of identity not only to people, but a symbol to the natural world. The body then, is an environment that first interacts with the clothing most closely situated to it. Rather than the garment modifying the behaviour of the wearer"⁴ with the natural element or animal it is representing, there is a viewpoint that the clothing actually embodies those attributes.

"Every piece I create has a special connection for me".

Marlene Liddle

Do you have any recommendations for costume teams on how to better invite and connect with Indigenous artisans when Indigenous "costume" items are called for in scripted character development?

Marlene: I think lead time is most important for Indigenous artisans. Particularly if a custom piece is being requested to be made for a production. For example, I was approached to create pieces for a movie that required cedar bark capes, skirts, robes and tunics. Initial discussions were around cedar bark being used as the material and this can be problematic because cedar bark has a harvest season, and material prep time also factors in.



Skirt made by Marlene. Tunic made by Athena Theyy
Movie: Edge of the Knife / Actor: Tyler York.

Most pieces can not be made so quickly. Knowing what is actually required is also important, because we started out with 3-4 pieces being "required" and once they saw the product it was changed to wanting to have 35 pieces this was done without an amendment to the contract. This segues into being fairly compensated for the work, which is important because the artisan is most likely focusing on delivering the product to this one customer and not paying attention to their real bread and butter, the long term clients.

Marlene would like to acknowledge her husband Mike Richard, two beautiful children: Chad Savard, Cori Savard, and two beautiful grand-children Hazel and Hendrix.

Carmen: When you are looking to design and/or make purchases for the costume, you have to know that particular culture being depicted. For, example, if it's a Cree story line, then purchase Cree Artisan made items to incorporate into the costume design that will tie into your research.



National Association of Friendship Centres

I usually check in with the local Friendship Centre. They are Canada-wide, so they are a good first contact. I make first contact by stating I am a Costume Designer and our script has a scene(s) that depicts the particular culture, and I want to talk with someone regarding the accuracy of the costume. I always get a reply and a contact and I go from there.

As artisans, we all know that our personal journey becomes the supportive fibre in all our storytelling endeavours. Enhancing our understanding and recognition of that thread of inter-connectedness in each Indigenous artisan's story, is a profoundly important element toward moving the individual and collective identity forward.

**"Kâakwasôwina ânaskohpicikâna
acimowôwina"**

Plains Cree "sewing attachment to stories"

Scroll to our **Additional Resource List: Bonus Sources** for suggestions from artisans' **Jeff Chief**, **Karen Nicloux** and **Editing Team**

An Open Book

CAFTCAD LIBRARY COMMITTEE

EDITION #3 EDITING TEAM

Isabel Bloor: **Editor and Writer**

Isabel has served on the CAFTCAD Executive Board, Education Committee and is the current Chairperson of the Library Committee. In her career she has worked as a Costume Set Supervisor on top of glaciers, in rain forests and throughout landmarks of global cities. Isabel has gained understanding of the wonder & rigours of filming on sets with crews in Canada, Greece, Hungary, USA, Mexico, Spain and Japan. As a graduate of the Dalhousie University Costume Studies Program, Isabel has further developed her skill base as a costumer to also include Theatrical Millinery. She has made head wear for film & television from her home base in Vancouver, as well as travelled to work in the Millinery department's of The Stratford Festival in Canada, the Hats & Jewellery Department of The Royal Opera House in England and The Australian Ballet in Melbourne. www.isabelbloor.com



Mariana Sandoval-Angel: **Layout Editor**

Mariana was born in Colombia and grew up immersed in a very artistic and creative environment. She took her musical and fashion design studies there to new levels eventually leading her to Canada where she has immersed herself in more study and work in the costume world.



Her choice to join CAFTCAD led her to the Library committee where she blends her love of history, writing, sharing of ideas and creating new content into the shared development of An Open Book Blog. Mariana's efforts have been instrumental for this newly launched initiative in 2022. Her support of CAFTCAD endeavours goes further still as she also participates on the Bespoke magazine committee. She currently works in a mascot company as well as a seamstress and dresser in Toronto [@mariana.sandoval.costumes](https://www.instagram.com/mariana.sandoval.costumes)

Rhonda Lucy: **Consulting Guest Editor** **(Question Development)**

Tsiktsinensawe Yakonkwe / Rhonda Lucy (she/her) is a filmmaker, costume designer, artist, and a 2-Spirit Haudenosaunee woman of Indigenous ancestry, based in Toronto, Ontario. I am the founder of "The Toronto Indigenous Filmmakers Collective" and "Sun Raven Arts". I've worked with companies such as Warner Bros. Paramount, Disney, FX, HBO, APTN and CBC in costume design and creature creation since 2004. I am an accomplished technician (IATSE 873, CAFTCAD, WIFT, and ACCT) and entrepreneur with a background in creative direction, fashion/SPFX, mask/puppetry, and sculpture arts. I have been named "Indigenous Youth Leader of the Year" in 2016 by Inspirit Foundation, am the recipient of the Netflix ISO apprenticeship sponsorship in 2021 and an alumnus of the 2018 CBC Indigenous New voices program. [@sunravenarts](https://www.instagram.com/sunravenarts)



Athena Theny: **Consulting Guest Editor** **(Concept Contributor)**

Athena is a costume designer born and raised in Vancouver. She holds an honours degree in forensic psychology with a minor in First Nations Studies, as well as diploma in Fashion Arts. Athena has worked diligently to consolidate her fascination of history with her



innate love of design. She has developed rarefied skills in leather tanning, weaving, tambour bead work, and silver smithing. Her devotion to applied arts has taken her from Algonquin community Kitigan Zibi to tan moose hides, to New York City where Vogue editor Anna Wintour obtained her jewelry. Athena's approach to costume design is research-based, with a particular interest in period pieces and stylized aesthetics. In 2019, Athena and her team won the CAFTCAD Award for Best Costume Design in a Low Budget Film and the Leo Award for Excellence in Costume Design for the Haida film Sgaawaay K'uuna/The Edge of The Knife.

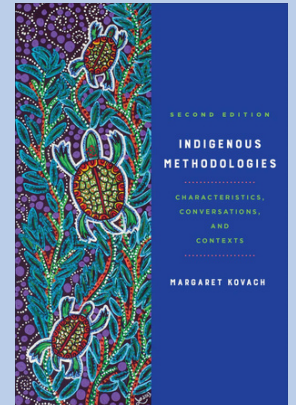
ADDITIONAL RESOURCE LIST

Indigenous owned or focussed book sources



Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts

The Gabriel Dumont Institute



Strong Nations



Strong Nations

Museums or unique collections/exhibits created in collaboration with Indigenous nations

Quebec indigenous museum

McCord Stewart Museum

Bill Reid Gallery /BC

Native Tech: Native American Technology and Art - Porcupine Quillwork and hair



Indigenous language interpretation service options

Language in Motion

Inuktuk Tusaalanga



Indigenous Fashion

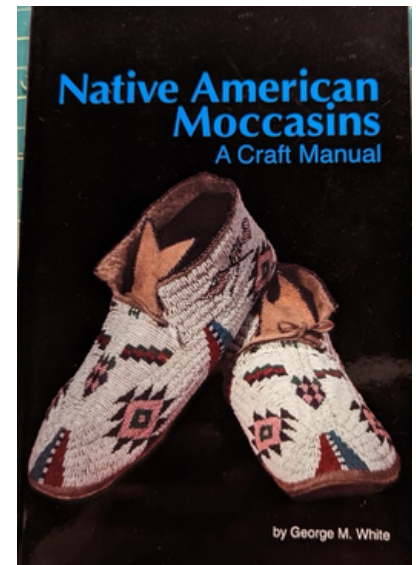
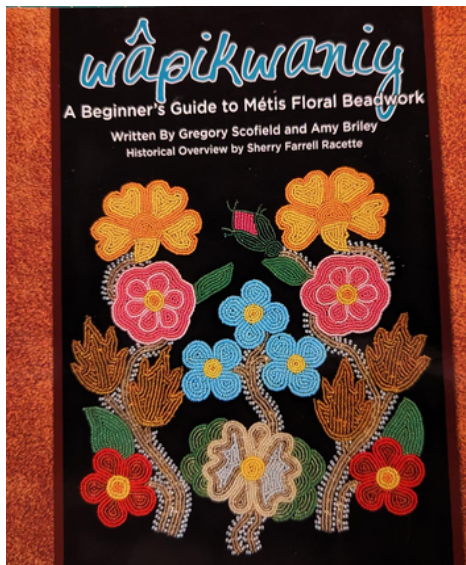
Indigenous success stories; first nations - Meet the Indigenous designers shaking up Milan Fashion Week

Sage Paul and six designers bring Canadian Indigenous perspectives to fashion's world stage



ADDITIONAL RESOURCE LIST - ARTISANS CURATED LIST

JEFF CHIEF RECOMMENDS:



1. Wâpikwaniy - A Beginner's Guide to Métis Floral Beadwork by Gregory Scofield and Amy Briley.
2. Sînapân Kîskasâkâs - A Guide to Making Contemporary Style Métis Ribbon Skirts by Bonny Johnson and Leah Marie Dorion.
3. Native American Moccasins - A Craft Manual by George M. White.

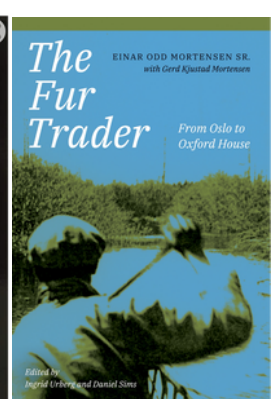
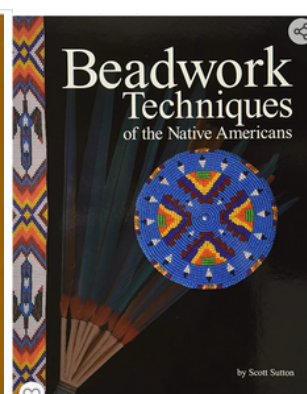
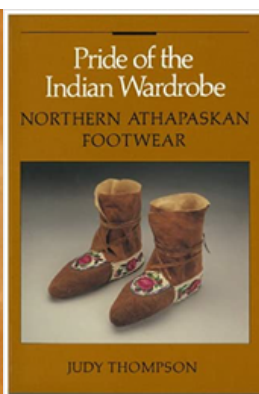
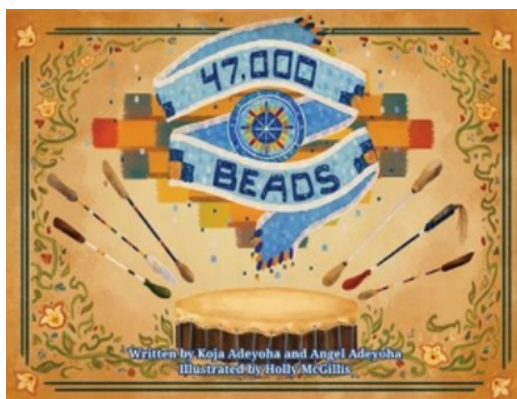
Jeff Chief is Cree from Onion Lake First Nation on Treaty 6 territory in Saskatchewan. He has been a costume stitcher, cutter, and costume designer in theatres across Canada including The Stratford Festival, The Globe and The Royal MTC.

Picture Provided by Jeff Chief.



Karen Nicloux is Northern Tutchone, Gwich'in, Cree first nation artisan from Mayo, Yukon. Member of Nacho Ny'ak Dun First Nation. Karen has been embroidering and sewing traditional clothing since she was 12 years old, having learned from her mother, Martha Buyck.

KAREN NICLOUX RECOMMENDS:

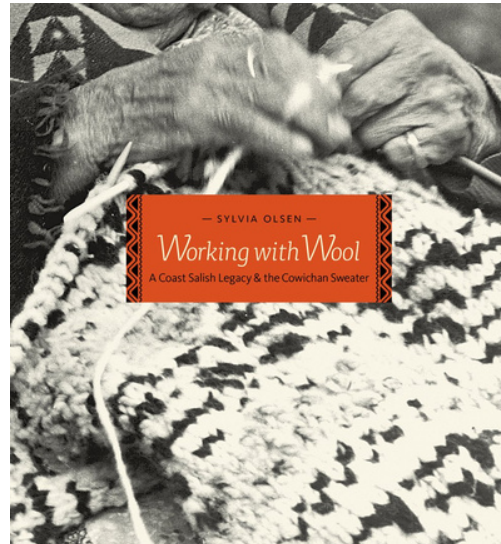
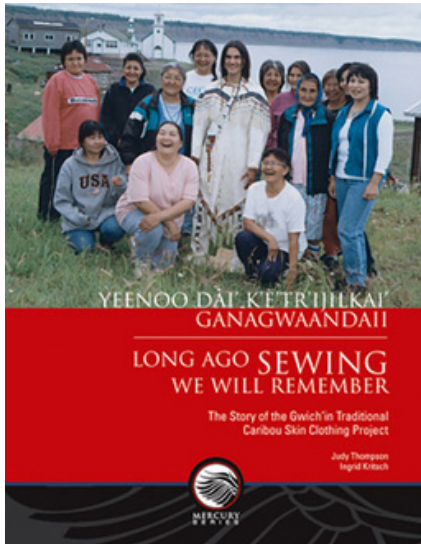


1. 47,000 Beads by Koja Adeyoha and Angel Adeyoha.
2. Pride of the Indian Wardrobe - Northern Athapaskan Footwear by Judy Thompson.
3. Beadwork Techniques of the Native Americans by Scott Sutton.
4. The Fur Trader from Oslo to Oxford House by Einar Odd Mortensen Sr.

Karen's picture & partial intro retrieved from: [Wilderness, Indigenous Culture And Hot Springs: It's All Accessible In The Yukon With Air Canada and Manitobah Shoe Store](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE LIST - ARTISANS CURATED LIST

Edition Editing team member **ATHENA THENY RECOMMENDS:**



1. Yeenoo Dai' K'e'tr'ijlkai' Ganagwaandaii - Long Ago Sewing We Will Remember: The Story of the Gwich'in Traditional Caribou Skin Clothing Project (2005) By Judy Thompson and Ingrid Kritsch

2. Working With Wool: A Coast Salish Legacy & The Cowichan Sweater By Sylvia Olsen (2010)

3. Sewing Our Traditions: Dolls of Canada's North (2010) Show curator Jennifer Bowen



4. Indian Artists at Work by Ulli Seltzer (1994)

