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Celebrating Canada through art: LandMarks 2017 opens in Indian Battle Park on June 20

The University of Lethbridge joins 15 post-secondary institutions, 12 leading Canadian artists, and seven curators in engaging with Canada 150 through LandMarks2017, a national art project. Created by Partners in Art (PIA) and presented by TD, this Canada 150 signature project brought artists together to creatively explore and connect with Canadian landmarks. From June 10-27, 100 contemporary art projects will be presented across 20 national parks and historic sites, including right here in Lethbridge at Indian Battle Park.

On Tuesday, June 20 at 4 p.m., Jackson 2Bears' (Art) studio art class opens its exhibition, Spatial Storytelling: land, art, place and community, in Fort Whoop Up and around Indian Battle Park. 2Bears chose Indian Battle Park because of its proximity to the University, the history in the land, and its importance to Treaty 7 and the Blackfoot people.



Jackson 2Bears' (Art) studio art class with local Blackfoot Elders. The exhibition, which opens with a reception at 4 p.m., Tuesday, June 20 at Fort Whoop Up, is open to the public until June 27.

“A good deal of what we did in the class had to do with studying and learning about that space,” says 2Bears. “So most of our classes happened down at the fort in partnership with the Galt Museum, who were very generous with their time and allowing us to use their facility.”

Instead of spending their time working in art studios, students spent time off campus, in the fort, hearing from the knowledge keepers of the Blackfoot territory.

“It was important to me at the outset that the course acknowledge the traditional territories of this area and the place we were working,” says 2Bears. “It was crucial to have people come in from the Blackfoot community and share the knowledge properly as the keepers of this land. It made sense for this to be a core part of the project.”

Guest speakers included Blanche Bruised Head, who welcomed the class onto Blackfoot territory and gave them permission to work there; John and Keith Chief Moon, who shared traditional songs and Napi stories; Terry Many Grey Horses, who spoke about moon cycles and tipi building; Susan Burrows-Johnson, who spoke about the history of the fort; and Martha Many Grey Horses, who was crucial in helping bring the LandMarks2017 project to life at the University of Lethbridge.

“As a Mohawk, I’m a guest here in this territory,” says 2Bears. “Even when I first moved here, Martha introduced me to the community and helped me feel welcome here at the University and also in the territory.”

Many Grey Horses helped arrange several of the speakers who shared their knowledge and inspiration with the class. Knowledge keepers presented day-long workshops on everything from Blackfoot creation stories, to the history of the area, and the history of the fort.

“All that information fed in to students doing their own work about that space, they collaborated a little bit here and there, but we all ended up making our own works,” says 2Bears.

The result is a collection of pieces that vary in scope and medium.

“Our projects are both celebratory and critical of Canada and the history of colonialization, the history of the fort itself, and people’s response to that,” explains 2Bears.

Visitors to the exhibition will see sculptures, paintings, performance and installation art, sound and video works. The pieces all tell a story, inspired by the knowledge keepers as well as the student’s own research.

For example, Alison Frank became interested in ammolite, which is very important to the treaties and is part of many creation stories. It also speaks to the mining extraction that took place on that land. From this inspiration, Frank created clay versions through raku firing, which creates a metallic or luminescent rainbow-like colour that looks a lot like ammolite.

Also in the exhibition are a virtual video piece by Joel Cross Child; a sculpture by Dene artist Jennifer Bowen, which represents a portal between this territory and her own in

Yellowknife; a large living sculpture using indigenous plants by Michelle Sylvestre; and a group project involving 15 youth silhouettes by Deirdre Earl.

The exhibition, which opens with a reception at 4 p.m., Tuesday, June 20 at Fort Whoop Up, is open to the public until June 27. LandMarks2017 is a collaboration of the University of Lethbridge, Partners in Art, Susan Burrows-Johnson, CEO/Executive Director of the Galt Museum and local artist Tanya Doody, who was crucial in providing labour and technical work in the project development.

To view online: <http://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/celebrating-canada-150-through-art-landmarks2017-opens-indian-battle-park-june-20>

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