



Our cover artist . . .

Linda M. Wright, of Gwich'in heritage, is a contemporary realistic painter who moved to Edmonton from Inuvik, Northwest Territories. In a broad sense, her vibrant images explore the environment, the land, nature and all its living creatures.

She paints on canvas, drums and wood panels and often fuses beads, glitter, leather hide, fabrics and fur into her pieces.

This work, "Music Is Life", is on display at the St. Albert Public Library gallery on the second floor for the month of June.

Indigenous artist aims to celebrate and honour the land through her work

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Lara Felsing traces back her love for art to her mother's passion for creating, and the support her family showed for her own.

"My mom makes traditional clothing. With hide, floral broadcloth, she makes ribbon skirts and shirts. And she definitely was my first sewing instructor. And as a child I drew all the time at my grandmother's kitchen table while she babysat me and my parents worked and my older siblings were at school. I was always really encouraged to be creative. I mean I make baskets in my practice now, but I've been making baskets since I was a little kid," Felsing said.

The Edson-based artist grew up in Peace River, and studied art at Red Deer Polytechnic. After that, she said she went to Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, as well as the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, Australia.

Her new exhibition *Kinship Ecologies* is running in the St. Albert Art Gallery until July 19. Felsing said her work, and her practice of making compostable paintings and creating her own paints through natural materials, is about instilling respect of the land.

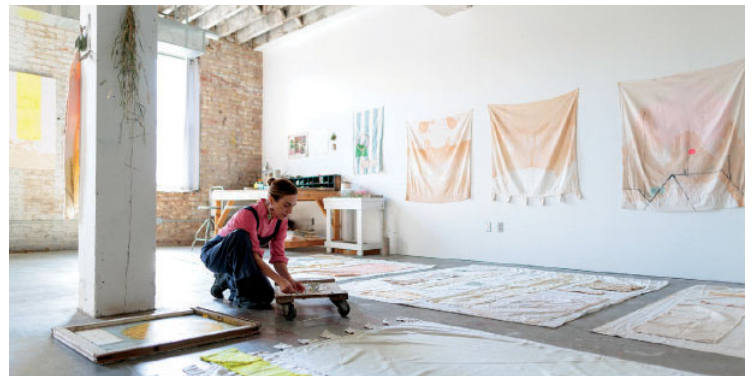
"I'll think about what petals or roots, or pine needles and pine cones, what can be used for pigment. Even something very common place that we probably have in our immediate surroundings. Things like dandelions make beautiful colours," she said. "It takes a lot of patience, but it's really rewarding. It just instills this respect of the land, because not everything is available when you need it. Sometimes it's a lengthy waiting period to wait until certain colours come out in the spring or summer in order to harvest them and make pigment."

The process varies between a day or two, or even as long as a month, depending on the what the material is. Felsing also plans what materials she uses for the theme of her piece.

"Sometimes it feels like the material aligns very quickly," she said. For example, if she's thinking of a piece centred around wildfires, she said her mind goes to charcoal or the needles that fall from the black spruce trees in the forest around her home. "It's not always about getting the exact colour, it's about the intention behind it."

Much of her work is centred around themes of the natural world, as well as climate change.

"My practice is a pretty direct response to what's happening on the land where I live," she said. She was evacuated twice



COLIN CONCES PHOTOGRAPHY/Photo
Lara Felsing kneels over three air quality blankets on the floor of her studio while she was a resident at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, Neb. in fall 2024.

due to the Edson wildfires in 2023 that burned over 200,000 hectares. Luckily, her home and work were not damaged.

The experience helped inspire a work where she wrapped trees in gratitude blankets made from second hand fabric and lined in a civil defence blanket from 1952. The blanket ceremony took place in May 2023, after she had already been evacuated once. She was evacuated again the week.

"I just felt that I needed to show gratitude towards the forest where I harvest," she said.

Her love for art that she took from her mom carries through to the rest of her family.

"Being around creative people really feeds creativity in others. I find the same thing with my family. If one person in our household is making something or doing something we kind of all gather and participate. I make pine needle baskets, my son makes pine needle baskets," she said.

Kinship Ecologies will run in the St. Albert Art Gallery until July 19, and you can visit Lara Felsing's website to see more of her work at www.larafelsing.com

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For more information please contact:
Joanne@stalbertmetislocal1904.org

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A Cree legacy fired in pottery

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The Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. is recognized world-wide for its staggering collection of artifacts. From ancient Chinese bronzes to the Apollo lunar landing module; from Dorothy's ruby-red slippers in *The Wizard of Oz* to Van Halen's Frankenstein electric guitar, they represent world history.

So, when Indigenous potter Jody L'Hirondelle Swanson was commissioned to create pottery for a Smithsonian exhibition, it became a life-defining moment. She chose to create four terracotta pieces: a large wheat plate and three vases dubbed Métis Line.

Proud of her Indigenous heritage, the St. Albert resident is a direct descendant of Jacques L'Hirondelle and Josephte Pilon. Dipping into her cultural heritage for inspiration, L'Hirondelle Swanson evokes the elements of earth, fire, water and air in her creations.

Held at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in 2002, the international exhibition was a mega hit featuring pottery from Indigenous artists across North American, South America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

At the time, L'Hirondelle Swanson was the mother of two young children living in Athabasca and a member of the local pottery club. Athabasca was renowned for its IXL Brick site of red clay found nowhere else in

the province.

"We would take a three-ton truck and fill it with clay. We'd shovel the clay in the basement, let it dry out, screen it for rocks, mix it with paint mixers and store it in old refrigerators," said L'Hirondelle Swanson.

The Smithsonian contacted the club asking if a representative would be interested in firing work made specifically from the red clay, and L'Hirondelle Swanson agreed. The terracotta pieces were shaped, fired, catalogued, coded, packed in wooden crates, and shipped to the Smithsonian.

"I only saw the exhibition on the website, but I did receive a coil bound book of all the submission," L'Hirondelle Swanson said.

Raised in small-town of Athabasca, population 3,000, she comes from a long Cree lineage and close-knit family. The youngest in a family of four, L'Hirondelle Swanson was born into a political family.

Her father was a town councillor and deputy mayor. Her mother was a bookkeeper and operated the town's Conservative office. With parental involvement in politics and service organizations, volunteering was way of life.

A studious girl, L'Hirondelle Swanson was also the yearbook editor for four years and played a variety of instruments including flute, piccolo, sax, trumpet and percussion.

"I also spent a lot of time in the forest and collected berries and plants. I learned to read animal tracks and had a good relationship with the land. For my 16th birthday, my dad



SUPPLIED/Photo

Jody L'Hirondelle Swanson currently sells her wares at the Alberta Beach Market.

bought me a 22 (caliber rifle) and took me out hunting. For him, it wasn't hunting. It was about bring home food for the family and my mum would make a roast."

By 1991, L'Hirondelle Swanson had enrolled at the University of Alberta's education faculty. While completing a psychology practicum in Northern Alberta, she became conflicted working under a series of stressful conditions.

"I had to help the government work on questionnaires that were very slanted and would take kids away from their families. It was difficult as some were my family."

She discussed the situation with her dean, and he suggested enrolling in either a yoga or

pottery class.

"I took a pottery class at the university and immediately fell in love with it. I was in the city, but I connected with the earth."

L'Hirondelle Swanson spent nine years working as an English, physical education, art and band teacher before transitioning to the City of St. Albert as a risk insurance adviser.

Currently, L'Hirondelle focuses on creating stoneware and porcelain wares selling them at the Alberta Beach Market where she owns a lakefront property.

"I find being back in the water reenergizes me. I find peace and solace. Even when we're busy, we go. It's nice to get out in the water or watch a fire at night." ■

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the devastating and ongoing impacts
of the residential school system.

We encourage all residents to learn more about
Indigenous culture and history in our community.



Red River Cart rolls into St. Albert Public

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Sir Alexander Mackenzie students will get to ride through history this week as St. Albert Public Schools unveils its new Red River cart.

SAM School students will be the first in St. Albert this June 20 to get hands-on with a Red River cart recently acquired by the St. Albert Public school district. The cart's rollout corresponds with the lead-up to National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21.

Amy Watson, the district's Indigenous education facilitator, said she asked Saskatchewan artist Garry Patterson to make this half-sized cart to help teach students about Métis history and other subjects. The cart arrived at district office in late May.

"It's a really strong symbol of Métis heritage," Watson said, one she felt deserved more attention in St. Albert.

Tradition in transport

Red River carts are two-wheeled wooden conveyances commonly used to haul people and cargo across the Prairies in the mid-to-late 1800s, the *Canadian Encyclopedia* reports. They are strongly linked to the Métis, so much so that some First Nations residents at the time called the Métis "half wagon, half man."

Watson said she asked Patterson to make a half-sized cart for ease of handling — a full-sized one would be the size

of a truck. Like all traditional Red River carts, this one is made almost entirely out of wood held together with pegs and leather, and can be put together in about 20 minutes — something teachers and students will get to try when the cart visits their school.

"It's very symbolic of the resourcefulness of the Métis," Watson said, as it was designed to be fixed in the field using the materials at hand.

Patterson, a retired plumber and carpenter, said he had a lifelong interest in Red River carts stemming from his family's deep roots in the Métis community. Looking for a hobby during the 2020 pandemic, he started making miniature carts for his relatives out of scrap wood. He now sells them through his daughter's website.

Patterson said he uses a mix of hand tools and power tools to make his carts, no two of which are alike. He does extensive research on the carts to make them historically accurate.

"One of the big things about Red River carts is the wheel," he noted — unlike regular wagon wheels, these ones are deeply dishd, which lets the spokes act as shock absorbers for the rough Prairie terrain.

Watson said Red River carts were designed to be easy to fix in the field without access to metal or blacksmiths; if you broke an axle, you just chopped down a tree and carved a replacement. They were also very noisy, as the driv-



KEVIN MA/St. Albert Gazette

St. Albert Public Schools Indigenous education facilitator Amy Watson shows off the half-scale Red River cart the district acquired in late May 2025. The cart will make its public debut at Sir Alexander Mackenzie School June 20 in the lead-up to National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21.

ers didn't grease the axles — the squeal of wood-on-wood could be heard kilometres away.

Watson said Patterson added intentional flaws to the district's cart (one of the arms is more curved than the other, for example) to make it look more authentic. He also carved "In honour of Marie Louise Vandal" into one of the floorboards to honour his mother, who encouraged him to teach others about Métis culture.

Watson said this cart will travel between St. Albert schools this fall for teachers to use in math, history, and transportation lessons. She also planned to get smaller model carts for students to build in groups.

Patterson said he was now building a full-scale Red River cart. He hoped his carts would encourage others to research Métis history.

Questions on the cart should go to Watson at amy.watson@spschools.org. ■

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