

The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford Story & Report re Abbotsford Community Foundation Community Fund for Canada 150 Projects 2017

Museums and art galleries are powerful tools for shaping how a community understands itself. They play a role in defining and negotiating our identities as nations, communities, and individual citizens. What events are remembered and how they are characterized has a significant bearing on how we understand ourselves individually and collectively within society. In 2017, The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford is responding to Canada's 150th year of confederation with exhibitions and public programs that address concepts of decolonization and reconciliation in order to deepen our respect and appreciation for Stó:lō culture and worldview, and explore the emergent attitudes and ideas that will inform a healthier collective future for settler/Indigenous relationships.

The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford was grateful to receive funding from the Community Fund for Canada's 150th Birthday to support a series of exhibitions and public programs that address Canada's turbulent colonial history and embrace the possibility of decolonization and reconciliation for future generations of Canadians. The Reach hosted four significant exhibitions on this theme between January and May 2017: *Grand Theft Terra Firma* (David Campion & Sandra Shields); *Poison, Pattern, Paradigm* (Carrielynn Victor); *Sq'ewlets: A Stó:lō Coast Salish Community in the Fraser River Valley*; and *Stretchers, Headers & Footnotes* (Lyndl Hall). Artists from Indigenous and settler backgrounds were brought together through a series of exhibitions that challenge the celebratory narrative of colonization and open up conversations around our complicated history as a nation. The Sq'ewlets Community, David Campion & Sandra Shields, Carrielynn Victor, and Lyndl Hall each offered extraordinary insight through their exhibitions, which were accompanied by a robust series of public programs that ranged from theatrical performance to artist discussions to educator workshops.

The Story of One Exhibition Project

Of these projects, one exhibition stands out as an extraordinary example of collaboration, determination, and reciprocal generosity. The Reach was thrilled to partner with the Sq'ewlets community in the launch of their significant online project. Sq'ewlets (also known as Scowlitz) is a Stó:lō community of roughly 250 people at the confluence of the Fraser and Harrison Rivers. The community (including leaders, Elders, and youth), partnered with archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, media experts and others to develop a remarkable online resource *Sq'ewlets: A Stó:lō Coast Salish Community in the Fraser River Valley*



(www.digitalsqewlets.ca). The website tells the story of the Sq'ewlets since time immemorial. It shares the Sq'ewlets stories for the youth, so that they may know their story for generations to come. It is also a resource for the public to gain a better understanding of the worldview, history, culture and language of this extraordinary community.

With support from the Community Fund for Canada's 150th, The Reach was able to contribute to this project in its final stages, as the website was publicly launched. The Reach worked with collaborators from the Sq'ewlets community and the website project to develop an exhibition which would parallel the website in order to celebrate its completion, promote its visibility, and engage visitors in the wealth of information available through it. A number of photographs from the site were enlarged and mounted in the gallery, a screening room played video excerpts from the site, and a computer kiosk allowed patrons to explore its depths during their visit.

Beyond the Exhibition Story Outcome



One of the most significant aspects of this project occurred after the exhibition closed at the gallery. The Reach donated the contents of the exhibition to the Sq'ewlets community so that the project could be permanently housed at the Sq'ewlets Band office in Deroche, BC. Staff from The Reach attended a ceremony in late June to acknowledge the partnerships that were established over the course of the website and exhibition projects and to mark the occasion of the exhibition being installed in the community.

The support made possible through the Community Fund for Canada's 150th Birthday allowed The Reach to make a positive step towards reconciliation through a project that highlighted the richness of Indigenous history in the Fraser Valley. To be able to install the exhibition at the Sq'ewlets band office was an honour and a way of reciprocating the generosity demonstrated by the Sq'ewlets community members who have spent so much time and energy putting together this resource. It is our hope that Canadians from coast to coast will visit the site to learn more about the Sq'ewlets community, and that it will become a model for others as a means to share Indigenous history and knowledge.

Programming and Numbers

Working with the numerous passionate partners who developed the outstanding online resource we were thrilled to play a role in sharing it with our audience.

Over 6,000 people experienced the exhibition while it was at The Reach.



- 350+ guests joined us at the January public *Exhibitions Opening Reception* at The Reach;
- *Brunch with the Artists* in the gallery was at capacity at 58 (photo);
- Hosted a total of 59 pre-booked learning tours, many of these by local schools;
- 4 intimate theatre in the round

performances (in the gallery) by University of the Fraser Valley were at capacity audiences;

- plus our educators artists led numerous youth confidence building workshops;
- 19 *Sunday Family Arts* sessions;
- plus a *Talking Circle* event and a *Black History Month Celebration*;
- numerous artist's tours & talks;
- to capacity weekly seniors C3 programs (Culture, Coffee & Cookies);
- a popular IndigenEYEZ learning day for local educators, and another one for Reach staff and volunteers; and
- a *Literacy Day* in partnership with Fraser Valley Clearbrook Library.

Publicity Local and National

These Community Canada 150 funded exhibitions and programming received unparalleled publicity including in The News Abbotsford; CBC Arts radio/video; The Tyee News, Culture, Solutions; The Georgia Straight, Vancouver; Gallery West, and more.

Our Public Program Participants said it best:

'Bravo for that amazing courageous work (*Grand Theft Terra Firma*). Thank you for allowing reality to come across. First step in reconciliation,' Jeeven + Tim, Montreal

'There are simply no words. The energy here is indescribable. We'll be back in order to give much needed revision of history its due. Hold the space!' Anonymous

'*Grand Theft*...a brilliant way to offer un-comfortable realities of where "we" are today and how "we" got here (speaking as a European). Using a contemporary vehicle which offers both humor and an opportunity for deeper reflection. Fabulous, genius even. Congrats on a magnificent piece of work,' Sam K, Bowen Island

'*Terra Firma* – The Imperial Stickup is absolutely brilliant!! My first reaction was to laugh at all of the sarcastic, gallows humor in it (e.g. points awarded for bad behavior – lie a game show

presentation). My deeper and sobering reaction was to feel a level of sadness and anger for the way that my European (British) ancestors treated the indigenous people of Canada,' H. Bridge

'Thank you for sharing the Natives' story. Simply an amazing exhibition!' S.

'Thank you so much for recognizing Stó:lō culture & history. Opening up people's eyes to the damage "settlers" inflicted upon the Stó:lō people is an important step to RECONCILIATION,' Sieglinde Stieda

'First time at The Reach. I found it very interesting and loved the Stó:lō exhibit. I learned a lot today, especially the history of what was in the newspapers in the late 1800's regarding Aboriginal people. Astonishing. Thank you for the experience,' Raven

'This exhibit is very moving and very instructive. The history is shameful but is presented with enough playful irony and artistry to get the message across without too much sadness. Still, the history is very sad and, one hopes, something that we all can heal from,' M. Drake

'Visiting the current exhibition(s) brought an array of emotion. To see the work behind the stories (*Grand Theft Terra Firma*) and the dedication and commitment to bring this out in a fashion that is relatable – I appreciate the work you've done,' Chief Alice Thompson.

'Ali and I enjoyed participating in a very unique cultural and fun activity (drum making workshop). We had an amazing time learning about something we didn't know a lot about. We enjoyed the entire workshop including the singing. I enjoyed doing an educational and fun activity with my little brother and connecting with him in a different way. It would have been cool to do more singing and drumming with Carmen McKay. The songs we did learn were just fantastic. Carmen talked about knowing where you are at all times. He talked about the importance of knowing your bearings, North, South, East and West. I think it's actually a very "grounding" exercise to stop and appreciate where you are in space and perhaps acknowledge the beautiful land and surroundings around you before whatever task is at hand,' Courage Eigbike and Ali, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of The Fraser Valley, Abbotsford

'Carman's teaching was excellent. I learned a lot about the Stó:lō First Nations. He provided some teachings on the Medicine Wheel. These were positive and were easily correlated to leading a healthy, balanced lifestyle. He also spoke about the importance of Drumming in Aboriginal culture and the sacred spirituality of it. He emphasized respect for all things in life; towards the Earth, animals, people and one's self. The entire workshop was excellent. Dawn, Carman's wife was very friendly and helpful and answered a lot of questions about the teachings that my Little asked. I walked away with a deeper understanding of the Spirituality of the Sto:lo first nations. The teachings of the medicine wheel resonate with me, and I will remember that. In essence, everything Carman taught has left a positive experience and I would love to learn more about the BC First Nations. I would love to see Carman and Dawn again for other art activities,' Melanie, BBBSFV