
THREADS
THROUGH
TIME

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VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL SCULPTURE BIENNALE
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THREADS THROUGH TIME

EDITED BY Lori Lai

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CONTENT

ABOUT THE EXHIBTION

أُخرِجوا من مساجدِهِم
وفي مسَاجدهم إستشهدوا
ففي فسحة الخروج والشهادة بنوا مسجدا

They were exiled from their mosques
And in their mosques martyred
So in the expanse of their exile and martyrdom
They built a mosque

- Efemeral

This poem by a young Muslim poet, Efemeral, is woven into the border of the 31x15 foot tapestry that frames the five monumental Coast Salish weavings of *Threads Through Time*. These words echo the depth and resilience of faith and tradition in the face of oppression, underpinned by the experience of exile, return, and rebuilding. Its verse can be repeated as a cyclical rhythm of history.

Across the world, textile traditions have been a vehicle for preserving and transferring knowledge–a form of documenting the present while looking to the past and shaping the future. Textiles are linked intrinsically to the creation, care, and demarcation of sacred and spiritual space, whether through prayer rugs, carpets, weavings, shawls, blankets, robes, or regalia. Weaving is also a universal language of care and shelter, of keeping the wearer warm and protected.

This project was created in response to *Paradise Has Many Gates* (a public art installation by Saudi Arabian artist Ajlan Gharem) that was launched in 2018 as part of the 2018-2020 Vancouver Biennale. *Paradise Has Many Gates* takes the shape of a chain-link fence mosque, situated in Vanier Park on Vancouver's picturesque waterfront. The city of Vancouver is built on the unceded traditional ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations. Until 1913, the site of the installation was a Squamish village called Seṅáḵw, whose residents were forced off their land, and their homes burnt to the ground to make way for the creation of the park and the expansion of Vancouver's urban sprawl.

Threads Through Time was conceived as a dialogue to address this history of displacement, and the role of spirituality and dialogue across cultures. The artwork was made to cover the floor of *Paradise Has Many Gates*, which appears as an enigmatic and ephemeral representation of a religious structure placed on unceded lands. Its provisional cage-like construction is both sheltering and disquieting: the building feels out of place, as if a mirage or a memory. While its architecture offers a moment of spiritual shelter and a sense of belonging to the many displaced peoples of Islamic faith who live in Vancouver, it is simultaneously a flashback to the violence and restriction inflicted in the name of religion and colonial expansion.

Unveiling Ceremony, June 2019

Knowledge, techniques, and materials of Coast Salish weaving were suppressed through colonial violence for generations. Angela George, Chief Janice George and Buddy Joseph, Krista Point, Debra Sparrow, and Robyn Sparrow–the six artists who worked together on this artwork–have all been instrumental in bringing the language of weaving back from the brink, through the labour of studying cultural belongings in museum collections around the world, speaking to Elders, learning about technique and pattern, and bringing these traditions into the present to pass down to future generations.

This project is the first time in 200 years that the three nations have collaborated in this way, and the resulting monumental weaving is a celebration and a powerful statement of cultural revival and the power of dialogue. For the artists, the process of weaving is a direct link to the ancestors whose voice speaks through patterns, colours, dyes, wool, and technique. Through collective making, this artwork has lent a platform for uneasy conversations, whilst providing an opportunity for learning about the Other and addressing centuries of oppression. The project is a visual manifestation of dialogues surrounding Reconciliation, and the sharing and celebration of cultural knowledge, symbolism, and self-identification.

Through reflections on ways in which land has been colonized, shared and demarcated, the weavers have created five individual, unique panels of 8 by 4 feet each. Inspired by this dialogue and honoring these experiences, jacquard weavers Ruth Scheuing and Mary Lou Trinkwon, and Muslim designer Doaa Jamal, created a large border which will hold these panels together to form a 31 by 15-foot tapestry that acts as a symbol and a document of this exchange. As this project tours Canada and other countries, *Threads Through Time* offers a methodology and a metaphor for bringing communities together through traditional knowledge and acting as a catalyst for unpacking questions of cultural belonging, displacement, diaspora, and the land.

FOREWORD

Barrie Mowatt

FOUNDER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF VANCOUVER BIENNALE

The touring exhibition *Threads Through Time* embodies the essence of the Vancouver Biennale's commitment and mandate where art is a catalyst for learning, community engagement and social dialogue, often resulting in social action.

Threads Through Time is a manifestation inspired by the monumental public art installation *Paradise Has Many Gates*, a life-size chain-link mosque—a structure representative of the Muslim faith—created by the 31-year-old Saudi Arabian artist Ajlan Gharem that was installed on the ancestral and unceded lands of the Coast Salish people, namely, the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh.

Paradise Has Many Gates was sited for the 2018-2020 Vancouver Biennale exhibition along the shoreline, on the ancient village site of **Sen'ākw,** which for millennia—before the colonial settlers arrived—had been the site of seasonal campsites and villages of the local Indigenous people.

Within the last decade and before the introduction of the "mosque" on this land, discussions about reconciliation and stories of displacement and acculturation had been occurring nationwide. While on exhibition for two years, *Paradise Has Many Gates* became the impetus for engaging seemingly disparate populations— Indigenous and Islamic communities—who discovered commonalities and histories that they were able to express via collaboration in one of the oldest art forms in the world, weaving.

As with the creation of the ten prayer rugs in the Weaving Cultural Identities exhibition, *Threads Through Time* speaks through warps and wefts to bond human beings in a universal language, free of the need for the written or the spoken word, free of the need for translation or interpretation, free to weave ideas and images for all of us to admire, enjoy and contemplate.

I hope *Threads Through Time* will be an impetus for other communities to come together through weaving, collaboration, and the sharing of their cultural identities, and, in so doing, their humanness—which, in turn, binds us all together.

BARRIE MOWATT
Founder and Artistic Director
Vancouver Biennale
October 2020

WORDS FROM THE CURATOR

Zarina Laalo

I was originally met with mixed reviews from local communities when I reached out to explain that the Vancouver Biennale was developing public programming around a new installation: a chain-link mosque reminiscent of a prison in the middle of a historic Indigenous village site with a startling history of colonial destruction and displacement. Unsurprisingly, this was a somewhat daunting task given the currently delicate/turbulent sociopolitical climate in Canada surrounding both Muslim immigrants and navigating the unravelling of the not so distantly past, grotesque treatment of Indigenous groups. This made action and conversation all the more necessary. Given its layers of complex meanings and incredibly pertinent location, the installation, *Paradise Has Many Gates*, was an opportunity to bring together two communities whose members faced some similar challenges from the state both historically and presently. Still, the question lay as to how we may find a way to connect the two groups, and in what way could we offer a platform to hear their voices?

After speaking to groups and individuals from both communities some key points became apparent:

- There is an obvious lack of visual representation of Indigenous culture and its history in Vancouver, especially in Vanier Park. This is due, in large part, to the destruction of historic works of culture from the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations. There are, however, groups of artists from each of these nations who have been spending more recent decades reviving these practices by studying, teaching, and, perhaps most importantly, creating.

- There are a number of dedicated individuals in the Muslim community who are at once devoted and also socially and politically conscious. There was an acute awareness and confliction around the challenging notion that they are also part of a continuing narrative of settlers benefiting from stolen land – a narrative that is only recently, slowly coming into the forefront of commonplace knowledge.

- There was a unanimous agreement among the communities that there needed to be ways to build stronger relations through mutual cultural respect and common grounding. Although solutions were not apparent, there was an agreement. We must listen. We must learn.

This common grounding we learned were underlying feelings of Fear and Loss in both communities. Fear of losing of one's identity. Fear of losing the memory/language/stories of where they came from. Fear of losing home, both literally and conceptually. Fear of losing sacred space. Fear is often overcome with faith, and thus the concept of prayer rugs in *Weaving Cultural Identities* became the bridge between two cultures. Weaving became an especially useful tool since it allows us to develop a language beyond words – it is a full, sensory experience both symbolically and physically.

While the works in *Threads Through Time* pay homage to centuries of tradition and heritage, the existence of these works today speaks to decades of pain, politics, and remarkable strength. Despite years of displacement, forced assimilation, and loss of identity, this group of artists have refused to accept this narrative. These original works are guided spiritually by ancestral teachings, and thus are at once traditional and contemporary; they are currently relevant in style, material, and subject, and speak to the power, presence and resilience of these communities – which they have passed on symbolically, like an outstretched hand, as a token of hope, peace, and friendship.

These monumental works return these three nations together to this historic site, and become a physical manifestation of a sacred, safe, inclusive space for all. It is a place for healing, growing, and learning from each other and our past. It offers a chance for renewal – to move forward as a growing community. Through cross-cultural collaboration it becomes a shining example and a call to action for further dialogue with expansive, diverse communities – inclusivity being vital in this present age. Across the nation, there are still clashes over land disputes, more struggles of identity, and increased confusion about how settlers can navigate their place on unceded lands with original inhabitants, including those forced out of their own lands. During my time at the Vancouver Biennale, we did not find definitive solutions to these complex issues – but we were humbled to have worked with revolutionaries who have been willing to relive some of these distresses in order to start important dialogues.

Weaving Cultural Identities started as a collaborative effort between artists who shared their narratives and experiences of the land. If phase one is seen as an exercise in Sharing, then *Threads Through Time* can be seen as an exercise in listening. The artists created by listening to their ancestors and the community members, and we in our part are encouraged to listen to the message of artists as some of the original inhabitants of the land. *Threads Through Time* is not meant to be the final phase of this endeavor – the conversation is far from over, and there is much more work to be done on a scale reaching from the local to the national level. All communities must be engaged in continuing to endeavor in opportunities to collaborate with and learn from Indigenous artists across the country, as we as a nation begin to truly unpack our colonialized history and strive for reconciliation.

COLONIAL DIASPORAS:

WEAVING CULTURAL IDENTITIES THROUGH TIME

Sharon Fortney

CURATOR OF INDIGENOUS COLLECTIONS, MUSEUM OF VANCOUVER

In this moment, we are increasingly confronted by the legacy of colonialism and the many ways that social inequity is embedded within the systems and institutions that govern our nation. We experience it on the streets, and see it unfurl in the media, as protests and calls to action for social justice. By acknowledging that systemic racism exists within our society, and that it is rooted in Canada's colonial history, we lay a foundation for redress and healing.

As a reconciliation initiative, *Threads Through Time* reminds us that the story of Vancouver is that of a multi-faceted diaspora, beginning with the displacement of the indigenous communities of Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh, to tiny reservations on the edges of their vast traditional territories. Immigration has brought other threads into this diasporic community – new people who also feel marginalized for their cultural difference, while longing for the specific geographies and traditions of their former homes.

Around the world, colonialism has removed a diversity of people from their homelands, alienated indigenous children from their families, and nearly eradicated indigenous languages from daily life. But this artwork tells a story of recovery, of traditions that have resurfaced, of creating a sense of identity for future generations that honors the traditions of the past. By recognizing what has been missing from their respective communities, each of the featured artists has found a way to reclaim lost teachings and in the words of Musqueam weaver, Debra Sparrow, "live it every day."

In Coast Salish art traditions, belongings are animated by spoken words of power and prayer, or by the breath of their maker. The weavings made for this project carry both story and intention – a sense of place, positive energy, and prayer, is woven into each work. So, it is fitting, that for the first time since Salish weaving was silenced in this place, artists from these three communities have united to create a ceremonial belonging, and that their shared work was unveiled at the ancestral village of **səńaʔqʷ | Seṅáḵw.** This village site is a place from which their ancestors were forcibly expelled, in the name of city building, in 1913.

Working together, Salish weavers Angela George, Chief Janice George, Buddy Joseph, Krista Point, Debra Sparrow, and Robyn Sparrow, have brought the memory of their shared ancestors and healing to the land by blanketing it with their work. By collaborating with Muslim designer Doaa Jamal, and jacquard weavers Ruth Scheuing and Mary Lou Trinkwon, they have used art to create a broader sense of community. Through artistic expression and shared understandings, we find reconciliation. The haunting poetry of Efemeral, woven into the borders of *Threads Through Time*, reminds us of the power of prayer to overcome the loneliness of displacement and that we can find healing by working together to build something new.

A recent exhibition held at the UBC Museum of Anthropology, titled *"The Fabric of Our Land"* saw a selection of ancient Salish weavings travel to Vancouver from Finland, England, Scotland, and the eastern United States. Prior to installation, these rare weavings were made available for study. Salish weavers, and other interested community members, travelled to Vancouver from other areas of the lower Mainland, Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, and Washington State to visit with these ancient textiles. This project was a form of knowledge repatriation, but these powerful belongings ultimately returned to the darkened storage rooms of foreign museums.

What we learn with access to our ancestor's handiwork is that they wove with resources found across traditional lands and kinship networks. Mountain goat hair blankets contain more than just mountain goat hair – they may also contain cedar bark, stinging nettle, Indian cotton, Indian hemp, fireweed and cattail fluff, feathers, and hair from the now extinct Salish wool dog. These are resources found at different elevations, from rugged mountain peaks to temperate rainforests to grassy wetlands. Likewise, the presence of wool weaving and mountain goat hair blankets, in locales such as Vancouver Island where these animals are absent, speaks to family and ceremonial connections that span across the breadth of what we call the Salish Sea.

During the Potlatch Ban (1884-1951), indigenous communities across Canada were under much duress. Many forms of ceremony were silenced or went underground. Although some weaving traditions, such as basketry, were at times accepted in residential schools – wool weaving was nearly eradicated in Salish communities as it was visually tied to traditional ceremonies and socio-political status. Since the 1960s, there have been several local revivals. The first concentrated efforts took place in the Fraser Valley and Washington State. Teachers from these regions, in turn, supported a revival at Musqueam in the 1980s and one across the Inlet in the Squamish community, at the onset of the new millennium. From these efforts came new teachers, and it is their work that has been woven into *Threads Through Time.*

Salish weaving is once again a vibrant tradition. Today, we can celebrate that Coast Salish community members are once again blanketed in ceremonial weavings in the longhouse and in the public eye. *Threads Through Time* created an opportunity to recognize the threads of family, ceremony and generosity that bind the three communities of Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh together. The weavings made for this project will travel as part of an Indigenous Biennale, but when they are done travelling, they will return home.

They were exiled from their mosques
And in their mosques martyred
So in the expanse of their exile and martyrdom
They built a mosque

من مساجِدِهِم أُخرِجوا
وفي مَساجدهم إستشهدوا
ففي فسحة الخروج والشهادة بنوا مسجدا

by Efemeral

“This is the first time in 200 years that our women are going to bring these blankets together”

-Debra Sparrow

WEAVINGS

4’ X 8’ WEAVINGS (L TO R)

ARTIST WEAVERS: Robyn Sparrow
Krista Point
Chief Janice George
and Buddy Joseph
Debra Sparrow
Angela George

31’ X 15’ BORDER WEAVING

DESIGNER: Doaa Jamal

JACQUARD WEAVERS: Mary Lou Trinkwon
and Ruth Scheuing

The weaving was designed to fit specifically on the floor of Ajlan Gharem’s chain link mosque installation, *Paradise Has Many Gates*. The design on the border is stylized, square Kufic text of the poem by poet, Efemeral.

LANGUAGES FEATURED: Arabic
English
Musqueam
Squamish
Tsleil-Waututh

REFLECTIONS

The following texts are transcribed from a series of video interviews between Videographer, Sahand Mohajer and the Threads Through Time artists. These interviews took place in 2019, midway before the project's completion. The transcriptions have been edited for clarity and length.

Unveiling Ceremony, June 2019

DEBRA SPARROW

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WEAVING

DEBRA: We didn't grow up with weavings: it was gone for 80 years and was never seen by our community, so we had to learn it by ourselves. We studied and researched it so we could bring it back. That's why we have different weavers with unique weaving techniques, even in the North Shore, like where [Chief Janice George] and [Angela George] live; it wasn't even there prior to them starting 10 or 15 years ago. We have been weaving for 35 years, so now it's becoming a part of our community again, which it should have always been, but it was gone because of residential schools. There's a resurgence in many communities, not just ours. It's in the USA. It's on Vancouver Island. It's in Sechelt.

Do you remember how it resurfaced in your community?

DEBRA: My sisters and I, we wanted to know what was in our community visually that was missing because we didn't see anything [of our culture] visually for 50 years, 60, 80 years. We would see the Northern people and the Southern people with all their beautiful regalia and different ways in which they created, and we thought, "*What were we doing?*" So, we started researching it, looking around, and asking our Elders.

Our grandfather happened to tell us about weaving, and we said, "*We didn't know about it. Why didn't you tell us?*" And he said, "*Well, we didn't think it was important to tell you or teach it because you'd never use it.*" And we thought, "*Well, that's not true.*" And then the more involved I got, the more I fell passionately in love with it. At first, I was the one that didn't want to be a weaver. Now, I can say that it's who I am.

This is about what we would be doing pre-contact. We would be preparing these blankets for all parts of our life. They were utilitarian. They were ceremonial. They reflected the values of who we are. A chief's blanket would be used for ceremony. There are plain white blankets, which are more of a twill twining weave, for everyday wear. Pre-contact, we had different blankets for different uses throughout the community. Now though, everybody wants the more beautiful, intricate ones.

Weaving- it's all about math. It's about science when you have to look at how to dye wool. How do you make medicine? Do you make medicine out of dyes, or dyes out of medicine? They're all one and the same. If you look outside, especially in the West Coast, it's all green. But if you take bark away from a tree, you can get red color from the inside bark. Now who'd have known that? It just looks brown and green. There are lots of mystery and gifts under what you see. It's been really interesting learning about my people's knowledge and learning about how valuable weaving and textiles are to them. I think, "Wow, I've seen textiles from all over the world, where people in every country value the work that the women are doing to clothe the people."

This is my passion. It's my connection to my history, going back hundreds of years and then bringing that message back here to a contemporary world- a world that I believe has lost its way. That's where the value comes in and if we don't value it, it disappears. That's why we're bringing it back.

ON THE COMING TOGETHER OF THE FIRST NATIONS FOR ONE LARGE WEAVING

DEBRA: We're all related in the lower mainland: the Salish people, Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Vancouver Island, and the South. Angela [George] is my cousin, and I'm sure if I trace things back enough, Janice [George] is too. We're all family. It's an amazing time for the women [in this project] to reconnect with the relationships that we have.

Coming together for the first time in 200 years is significant and a blessing. In this particular area where we all live, this is going to be the first time for us to come together since these weavings have been silenced. And I say silenced because they kind of went into a deep sleep, some of them are in museums in Europe, put away in a drawer, sleeping.

These blankets reflect our unity, history and connection. I look forward to sitting with them, and seeing us all together, each with our own stitching process, because it's unique. The world hasn't seen this before. It's amazing.

The prayer rugs that we're preparing, for Threads Through Time, we don't kneel on them but we stand on them. Because we stand in who we are, when we do ceremony. Standing on our weavings is like praying because we're acknowledging everybody in our village and in our long house. Everything we do is around these weavings; so we stand on them, blanket in them, wrap in them, and then we gift them.

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *PARADISE HAS MANY GATES* AT VANIER PARK

DEBRA: I'm really honored to be a part of this group of women who are creating the prayer blanket for Vancouver Biennale, for [Paradise has Many Gates] at Vanier Park, because it's a meeting of cultures. If you go back in time, you will recognize within each culture, the similarities of the values they have for the land they live on. And this project reflects the land, not just the people. [It reflects] all the creation stories and all the ways in which we are gifted as humans to be responsible and look after our environment. We don't do this anymore because we have assimilated into a way of thinking that we have to be educated the colonial American way. What's wrong with our own way? What happened that we allowed these different mentalities to overtake us?

We should be able to live equally: without having it one way or the other way. Balance. That's the way I look at it. When we understand other cultures and our own, we all have something to offer. Instead we feel that the powers are the mighty powers of whatever group imposes power. Colonial powers imposed their form of knowledge but all along, we have had our own knowledge, as ancient as time. We've been here for thousands of years. Thousands and thousands.

We're sometimes misunderstood. People who are not of the same culture, faith, or understanding have their own opinions about who others are, no matter who they are. We may not pray the same. We may not eat the same food. But we are, in some way, all connected to whatever land we come from. So, we share this land now with everybody that comes to Vancouver, and this mosque [Paradise has Many Gates] is absolutely beautiful. I was very taken back by it, and I wanted to know these people. This culture is as ancient as our own. What a unique journey that we get to share, with other weavers. To unroll this huge prayer rug, bringing our ancient cultures together on this shared land. If we can [all] have a relationship, and an understanding, maybe the world would be a better place.

ON THE TITLE *THREADS THROUGH TIME*

DEBRA: I feel a strong connection to our people, not only the ones that exist, but even more so the ones that are not here, and so I have a strong relationship with what we can't see. There are messages that come from the universe: be it from God, Allah, Buddha, or whatever culture we come from, I imagine these beautiful threads, almost like golden see-through threads, coming down with information and reminders about who we are as not only humans, but spirits. The spirits are communicating with us all the time, if we're listening. And most people don't listen. But I've been brought to that understanding and knowledge, through the work that I do. I've reconnected with those threads, and those threads come through time. They never stopped. They never went away. And they're reconnecting with all of us now, asking us to re-evaluate who we are in this world today. We cannot continue to plow through the world the way we have been without remembering the values of humanity. When I take the threads from my loom, I'm reconnected with that knowledge. And it's a reminder that they've always come through time and they will continue to come through time.

These are the fibers, that I feel, come from heaven- not just the universe, and they wrap themselves around each one of us. There's knowledge in that. That might sound romantic to you, but I think we're all looking for the same thing, which is an understanding of love and why we exist. To me, that's the significance of all of the fibers of different cultures coming together to unveil this beautiful weaving.

We grab these threads, and our DNA runs through them, right up into the universe. So, our people are not gone forever. They're still around us and through us, through these threads.

ON THE POEM

DEBRA: Well, I think genocide happens in every culture, no matter where we come from. But we're supposed to be praying for love, not for war. Some religions stripped away anything they could in the name of God. This happened here when the Catholic and Anglican religion came to Canada, well what you know as Canada, we called it our homeland. And we wondered what kind of God that was, that would do this, because the one we knew, living in our own land, was not that kind of God. And when I think about the Muslim people, their religion, and their respect for their beliefs, I often wonder how these things take a turn for the worse in their own countries, too.

And so, in Reconciliation here in Vancouver and all over Canada, there has been a big, big controversy over "*how do we go in a direction of healing?*" Healing takes a long time; it doesn't just happen in a year or two. And how are we going to reconcile? I believe, because I'm a part of it, that these textiles are our saving grace, no matter what culture we come from. We kneel on them, we pray on them, and wrap ourselves in these blankets and rugs, and in the way that we feel it is part of a journey that's ongoing

I want to go to the place that allows us to get along as human beings and not always be looking at the negative of another culture, because we know how that feels in our own land. And this is the foundation of it: you can't build a beautiful mansion if you don't have the foundation in place. But, if your foundation is solid, you can build the best mansion. This weaving is our foundation, and we'll begin to rebuild. And when we build, we'll be strong, stronger.

I hope this piece travels a little so that other people have a chance to understand the significance behind it, because too many times we're misunderstood and we're judged wrongly. I think people in any culture are attracted to beauty, and when they look at the weavings and they see the beauty in it, then they're attracted and they want to know who made it and why they made it. When they learn about the craft, they begin to understand that their own history and culture is not far off that, and it opens many gates.

ROBYN SPARROW

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WEAVING

ROBYN: It just came to me; I never know what I'm going to do until I start. I was sitting in front of my loom for a long time to try and figure out. I wanted to go simple and have nice waves and different design elements that represent our Salish blankets. I didn't want it to be too loud: I wanted it to be nice and soft. I wanted it to be able to flow, so that's how I came up with this.

With the tabby, you're just going over and under every other one. And then when you feel like you've finished that design, you have to go back and cover it up. This technique makes a more precise pattern and design than when you do it with the twine, because it makes the weaving bulkier. I use both tabby and twine. Then I just change up the colors where I feel I need it. They're all supposed to be four by eight. But see, what happens is once you get it on the loom it starts to shrink. And even if you think you've measured right, once all the tension is off the bars, it shrinks up.

Sometimes when I'm standing here, I can just go crazy on the loom and then a couple of hours goes by.

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WEAVING

ROBYN: Weaving to me is just part of who I am and where I come from. It's a gift, it's in my blood, I can't get away from it once I start it. And, it's super important to make sure that I pass this on to my grandkids, the rest of the community, and the other nations, so we can all sit back and be proud. That's what I think about when I'm sitting in front of a loom.

My granddaughter, she's 14, has already made a piece herself and I'm teaching my 5-year-old granddaughter now. When I'm close to the bottom [of the design], I get both of them to weave some rows on. So, every weaving, they have a little touch of it.

ON THE REVIVAL OF WEAVING

ROBYN: [I prefer] not to get too political about it and get into different parts of our territories and stuff because I just feel like it says more when it's there and it's quiet, and it's soft, and it's just hanging on a wall or around someone's shoulders to blanket them, whether it's in ceremonies or sad times. I really try to just be true to that. To me, it's just quiet and peaceful, and I like it to stay that way. That's my little piece that I can contribute to our community, to our other nations, and to whoever witnesses it or sees it hanging on a wall.

I feel like these pieces can speak for themselves. When I was making this, I was going through some tough times and I thought, you know, it just helps me to stay calm and quiet and just be at peace. It's pretty, and I just want people to see it. It's really meditative for me.

ON THE POEM

ROBYN: I like the spiritual aspect of it, because it does come from a different place for me and I think that the connections to other nationalities is quite similar and universal. It's a tricky one to answer.

What it's saying is that they're continually rebuilding, even if they get torn down. That happens with First Nations. We continue to go on with our traditions and our culture and there's been a lot of outside people that tried to destroy all that. And it's similar to the mosque idea: even if they tear it down, we'll just build it back up, and we'll continue. Working with all the other weavers really helps with the intertwining of the cultures and the different traditions that we all carry and hold dear to our hearts.

ANGELA GEORGE

ANGELA: It's in my research there's so many similarities with our beliefs, the patterns, designs, what they represent and the significance behind them. It's not just a piece of art, it reflects a prayer of history, teachings, ways of learnings, like methodologies. And there's so much behind them. Just like our weavings are very significant. I was looking into the prayer rugs, some of the patterns, like the triangles, the waves, the mountain designs and the similarities in that.

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WEAVING

ANGELA: I didn't grow up around weaving because my mom never got the opportunity to learn. I didn't witness my grandmother or my great grandmother weaving, or any aunties, because weaving was lost in our families after residential school and the loss of our culture. Those parts of who we are were taken away through colonization and through the residential school.

To me, weaving is a reconnection. It's bringing back something very instrumental in expressing who we are as Coast Salish people. It is a window to the past and a way of connecting to our ancestors. When I sit at the loom, that's what I feel: I'm there and I'm reaching back into the past and bringing forward traditional knowledge, and ways of thinking and expressing, and ways of holding our knowledge through the weaving. Something that is for us, here, today, and something that can be brought into the future. It's a way of documenting who we are and our worldviews.

It was about six and a half or seven years ago, when I started weaving. I was very close with my mom, she's gone now, but she had always wanted to learn how to weave. I have an auntie on the other side of the family who learned weaving, and I know that it was something that my mom had always longed to do. She felt a connection, "*we have to learn; we've got to bring that back.*" But she left us quite young and was never able to learn.

Through connecting with weaving, I feel like I'm doing something she had set out to do. It almost feels like I am trying to bring it back on her behalf. Even though she's gone, it's a way for me to connect to her and her ancestors, my great-grandmothers and so on, generations back, of weavers through my heritage.

It is very important to me to be a part of reviving it. Growing up, there were not a lot of weavings around, so we weren't exposed to it. There's this resurgence happening now where you go to a ceremony and you see weavings. Woven headbands, capes, mats and they're being used in ceremonies and being worn as regalia. It was very rare to see that growing up and now it is definitely coming back. It's being revived for our people, and it's an exciting time to be learning weaving and to be connecting with all kinds of people, through this project and through our communities.

I teach weaving as well. There are so many people who want to learn how to weave. As I learn, I share and teach, and I've accumulated looms and a lot of wool, it becomes a real hobby. It's something that I do naturally when I sit in ceremony, I have a little loom and I'm weaving. People are intrigued, especially the young people which is exciting because there's a real passion to bring it back through all our generations of Coast Salish territory. It is a pretty exciting time.

ON THE WEAVING PROCESS

ANGELA: I like to start by spending time in front of my loom. We have to get things prepared by warping up, but before that, there is a lot of math and planning involved in a weaving. I'm inspired by things in nature and I see designs when I am out on the inlet paddling or walking in the forest. There's colors and patterns in nature that inspire me. I think "*that would be really nice to try to weave that and to incorporate this into a weaving*" and I take that, and start by sketching. Then I might start graphing it on graph paper. I take all of that intention of what a weaving is going to be, with the pattern and design, and I bring it to the loom and that's where the connection happens. Whatever it is I'm weaving, starts to become a reality. And I can have it all planned out, the best pattern, sketch and everything, but when I sit at the loom it actually takes on a whole new life of its own and that's just the way it goes.

When I sit at the loom and I start warping up and I start laying that foundation, that's a key point in the planning and designing of what this weaving is going to be, because it's beyond us as weavers. There is a spiritual connection that happens there and I firmly believe the weaving is going to become what it's meant to be. It takes a while to connect with that as a weaver, to sit in front of the loom with no other distractions and spend that time. You can go into another space in time, another realm, and just be free to weave. It's about that connection: finding that moment where it clicks and just becomes what it is going to become.

ON THE TITLE *THREADS THROUGH TIME*

ANGELA: *Threads Through Time* is a very beautiful statement. To me, it's indicative of what we're doing as weavers. We are threading through time. We are sitting at the loom and reaching into the past and weaving those stories and understandings here into the present. We are documenting them for the future generations.

ON THE COMING TOGETHER OF THE FIRST NATIONS FOR ONE LARGE WEAVING

ANGELA: It's an honor for me to be a part of this project; coming together in unity and harmony with weavers from the other nations in our territory, here. I think that the theme for our weavings is to express the significance of our inlet because we have a real vested interest and connection to this territory. We feel a connection to this land, Mother Earth, and the water she provides us with this inlet.

To work together with the other nations, and in general the Vancouver community, is a significant act of acknowledging that we're all one: we have a common ground and are all connected. And the things that are important for one are important for all. The health of our territory and our unity comes together in a ceremony where we stitch our panels together. It is going to be a very momentous time for us to work together. It is going to be something very powerful and amazing to be a part of.

At the museums, they're holding some of our old weavings and it seems apparent in some of the patterns and designs, that there was more than one weaver working on a piece together. In some of those weavings you can see that they were stitched together. I see that we are reconnecting to something that was done in the past here in Coast Salish territory and as a young new weaver, to be a part of that is very exciting.

ON THE UNVEILING OF THE WEAVING AT *PARADISE HAS MANY GATES* AT VANIER PARK

ANGELA: To *Reconcile*, I mean, people have different interpretations of what that means, but when you get right to the heart of that, it means *to come together and bridge gaps*. I think this project is a huge step in that direction. We are working together between our communities, to show respect, and raise the profile of the concepts and energy around weaving and how it relates to prayer and the prayer rug. I think it's a very innovative way of demonstrating Reconciliation, and really honoring the territory and the land.

I was very inspired by the Islamic prayer rugs and I was fascinated to learn how similar some of the designing and the stories that the prayer rugs were telling. It just seems there's so many similarities between those and our weavings. And I think it is very symbolic of the notion that we are all one. This project is a fascinating way to show unity and harmony, and how meaningful prayer is in our communities and how meaningfully we document that, and demonstrate that to the world in our weavings.

ON THE POEM

ANGELA: It's impactful. It's a poem that I can relate to through our history as Coast Salish people. Having our lands taken away and being put onto these little boxes called reserves, reservations, and having our language, culture, and our lands taken away. It's a very similar history, but through it all we've survived and that's what I hear in that poem. It says to me: "we've survived and we surface again and we are reclaiming and repatriating what is ours, what belongs to us." And that shows an incredible strength and determination to carry on, to reconnect and revitalize what is our inherent rights. But not only our rights to this cultural tradition and these mosques, but also our responsibility because we have a responsibility to uphold our story, and to bring back these weavings.

Are there any more thoughts you want to share (as we come to an end)?

ANGELA: I know *Threads Through Time* is going to impact a lot of people and expose people to different worldviews. When I think about the Western worldview in comparison to the Coast Salish and Muslim worldview, and what I've learned through participating in this project, I'm amazed and overwhelmed by the similarities in our communities, philosophies, and in our principles.

Our Coast Salish traditions and culture is very much connected to the same principles and philosophies, from what I've learned, as the prayer rug. Through the process of weaving, you learn, and you grow. You can never predict what the outcome is going to be. If you believe in what you're doing, it's going to bring you to new places, new understandings, new awareness, and I think that's what this whole project is doing on so many levels, for so many people. So, it's been a real honor to be a part of it.

KRISTA POINT

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WEAVING

KRISTA: Weaving was taken away many years ago by the Church so to be a part of its revival is a great experience for me, because I feel that this connects me to my ancestors. They're one of my inspirations to bring back weaving. I've been weaving for 36 years now and each weaving is special to me. It's very important to me to be able to carry on what was taken away and be able to show my community and the world what Coast Salish weaving is about. I would like to pass it down to my children. I have three daughters and one granddaughter. And my goal is to get them sitting at the loom one day and helping me or doing their own work and teaching them how to spin wool and dye wool.

Back 35 years ago, we did our first weaving with design in it. And in our culture, we're supposed to give our first weaving away (our chief and council would pick names to give it to that person). I was so lucky to pick my own father's name and he received my first weaving, which I have here with me- and I still hold it today. Two years after I learned how to do this weaving, he passed of lung cancer. He was one of my inspirations to keep going because he always said he was so proud of me for bringing weaving back to our community.

My father went to residential school, and he was the one that informed me about what was taken away from us, so hearing those words come from him made me determined to carry on and keep going. And I still sit at my loom today and think about the words he said to me 35 years ago. It's a great feeling to just sit at my loom. It just brings me closer to my ancestors: it's like I can feel them all around me, watching me, inspiring me, and sending me visions of what I should be putting on my loom.

ON THE WEAVING PROCESS

KRISTA: The process of weaving begins with splitting the sheep wool, roving it, and then spinning it through spindle whorl, and then dying the wool with certain plants that you would go out and pick, like stinging nettles and lichen (lichen is rarely found around our community).

The dying process is done using traditional plants that we can find around our community like stinging nettles, lichen, horsetail, or even dandelions. A lot of people don't like dandelions because they grow all over, but they make a very beautiful color. Lichen is a type of moss that you would pick off an old tree. It takes 50 years to grow on a tree. When you pick some, you have to leave some so that it continues to grow, and certain trees that you pick it from can give you different colors. I've used three different lichens and I've gotten green, a beige color, and a gold color, which are beautiful. Stinging nettles will give you a nice olive green. And the dandelions will give you a really nice yellow.

Once it's all complete, you spin your warping. The warping is the first strands that you put on your loom. And the warp threads are made by spinning two strands of wool together, which will make it strong enough to hold on a loom because you have to pull the warping taut enough so that it won't come off. Then once your warp is ready to go, you're ready to weave. It takes about maybe one or two weeks to process all your materials before you can get going on the weaving. It's a long process.

You're doing it the traditional way?

KRISTA: Yes I am. And I enjoy it. I've dyed with onion skins as well because certain plants, you can only pick in the early spring and then once it's past spring, they don't give as much color out to you. It's always good to pick the stinging nettles closest to the ground.

ON THE COMING TOGETHER OF THE FIRST NATIONS FOR ONE LARGE WEAVING

KRISTA: I hope to gain relationship and partnership during this experience. I am open to learning new techniques and skills from different communities and cultures, as well as sharing my personal weaving. Like I was saying, everyone has their own style, technique, and knowledge of weaving.

It would be great to sit down with these other weavers and watch them do their weaving to learn how they do their stitching because I know my stitching is a little different than Squamish ladies'. They were taught a different way of weaving from the bottom to the top, and with me, I start from the top and go to the bottom. It would be wonderful to be able to learn how they start their weaving and warp their weaving. Same with watching Debbie [Sparrow] and Robyn [Sparrow] weave because their techniques are a little different than mine, too.

Does the land at Vanier Park have any special resonance for you?

KRISTA: Actually, that is an area is where people used to camp out and live during different parts of the season, they'd be moving around to different places. Back then, it was not called Vanier Park. This is a place where our ancestors walked and fished, and the whole of Vancouver, you can just feel the vibe, the presence of them spiritually. It's a great feeling, just to know that they lived in these certain different parts of Vancouver, not just in one area, but up and down the Fraser River as well.

ON THE TITLE *THREADS THROUGH TIME*

KRISTA: The title to me means coming together with a common interest. For the three communities (Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh), I think it's very important for us all to come together and show what techniques we have. You can see in some of the weavings that have been brought in- the different styles and different materials that are used. This is unique with each weaver, which is very interesting, I find.

I'm thankful and grateful to share my artwork, knowledge, and culture with the world. I think it gives people a look at our First Nations life and the ways of our culture. And it's very exciting for me to come together with the two other nations and to show people who I am and where I come from as a Coast Salish weaver.

CHIEF JANICE GEORGE AND BUDDY JOSEPH

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WEAVING

CHIEF JANICE GEORGE: We, the Salish, talk about this a lot. This is the first thing we say when we teach weaving, we ask, "What is Salish weaving, and what does it mean in our community?"

To me personally, it means carrying on the teachings from my ancestors, and in particular my grandmother. She heard it from her mother and her grandmother. So, that brings us right back to pre-contact. The teaching is that when we go to a public event, ceremony, or something, we wear a shawl. The shawl is for protection, of our feelings, and from other people's feelings.

That's what we teach weavers to do—to put your good feelings, your prayers, and your protection into the weaving. And the person who's wearing it, they can feel it, and it helps them. That's the foundation of our ceremonies. The first thing that starts a ceremony is you, the blanket and the speaker with a weaving. You put it over the left side of the speaker, and it ties on the right side. That's to protect their heart.

That's just a small part of it. There's so much more. And we believe that's bringing back the Squamish people, that when we're weaving, the ancestors come and they're so happy to see us do it again. And the elders are too. Weaving brings a lot of good feelings to our community, and for our elders because they didn't get to do the weaving when they were children. They went to residential school. They weren't allowed to practice their culture or have their customs. It was taken away from them. So, bringing it back into the Squamish community has been very meaningful. It's been a real privilege and an honor to be able to do that.

Do you remember how it resurfaced in your community?

BUDDY JOSEPH: We started teaching in 2004 with one weaver in our community, so Janice and I took it upon ourselves to really set up in our mind that we had to start teaching. We taught our youth, elders, and community members who were residential school survivors. As Janice was saying, they missed out on all those things. Cedar bark, language, all the weaving. We focused on our two education departments in the Squamish Nation. We also looked at other First Nations, primarily their education departments, their assistant teachers, and started going into the schools. We wanted to create more weaving teachers.

That became the model. We started looking to create a sustainable art form, and really that's what it is. As time progressed, of course, we learned different techniques, like stitching. We started talking to our elders and connecting with the spirituality and the customs of how

we use weavings in our ceremonies, and what they represent. It brought even more meaning to instruction and it meant so much more to our students as well, that they were able to go back in time and bring weaving forward into the future.

And as we learned more about weaving, we actually got to study the older weavings. Unfortunately, we couldn't learn from those teachers or their stories. We know they're telling a story in their weaving, but we can only interpret their stories.

Today, we encourage our students to tell a story through their weaving. We strongly recommend that our students put their good feelings and prayers into the weaving as they weave it. Some of them sing songs. And like Janice was mentioning, that's your spiritual protection when you're wearing it. Especially in a ceremony when you're inviting hundreds of people to witness it and we're also inviting our ancestors to be there. Maybe there could be negative energy in the room. Well, the weaving is like your shield against the negative aspects that could be in the world. That's an important part of what the weaver's job is and what we teach our students to do.

CHIEF JANICE GEORGE: We have over 3000 people who have tried weaving from when we began teaching in 2004. That's a lot. And there are a lot of people who continue to weave, and weaving is the way of their life now.

It makes us really proud to be able to go to a ceremony and see that more than half of the robes that are being worn, or the ones that are being put on the floor, are handwoven. Yes! Handwoven, every warp, every stitch is handwoven. It brings a different feeling to the ceremonies, and it brings a different feeling to the person out on the floor wearing it. It makes a big difference in every ceremony.

ON THE TITLE THREADS THROUGH TIME

CHIEF JANICE GEORGE: Yes, the title, Threads Through Time has a lot of meaning for me. Thinking about our ancestors, and really, it wasn't an easy job to carry this knowledge forward. They went through hard times. They went through poor times, meager times, when food was little and it was hard to survive. Our ancestors carried that knowledge with them and it wasn't an easy job to do.

I thank the grandmothers for bringing this knowledge through time for us. It means a lot to me, to be able to do what our ancestors did and to make them proud, and to make our elders and community proud, and to have weaving back again. The knowledge is back in our community and people are doing it very proudly. It's a highly-respected art in our community. But it's not just an art, it's one of the most highly respected things we have.

Traditionally, the weavings were made from mountain goat wool and a special dog that was bred and whose fur was spun in with the mountain goat wool. They also spun in cedar, and fireweed, and a lot of different plant fibers were used to strengthen the warp, and the fibers, to make it rain-repellent. Our ancestors passed on a lot of knowledge. They carried that thread through time for us. And I'm really so honoured and grateful to be able to pass that on too. All my life, I've seen that photograph behind me (points to a photograph of a traditional blanket). I've seen it in books. I've seen it everywhere. I've always admired those blankets ever since I was a child. And to be able to weave like that is something I always wanted to do. To be able to do it now and to be able to teach it is really a privilege for me. I respect it and I hold it high in my life.

BUDDY JOSEPH: The other thing we've done in our lives is study our history. We look at our genealogy, and we can go back to the early 1900s. The Squamish Nation went down to about 200 people then. But the further you go back in time; the population gets bigger. We look at pre-contact. There's the customs and the language, spirituality, philosophy, creation stories. But as you get closer to 1900s, the population starts decreasing, as Janice said, it's those generations of ancestors that made it through in the weavings we do today. There's weaving but there's also cedar bark, baskets, and clothing. For us, the tree of life is our cedar tree.

When I think about weaving through time, I think of how my great, great grandmother was filmed in 1928 in her late nineties. So that's very inspiring for me. When we had a chance to learn, it's like we were picking up the mantle of something that almost slipped away. We only had one weaver in 2003/2004, and he wasn't teaching. And so, to be able to learn to weave and then add the knowledge of what and how they're used, how to weave the designs, it just means so much to be able to hand that off to the next generation. We have youth now, primarily young women in their twenties and thirties, who are really eager and hungry for knowledge.

It's been our goal to seek out those students because they already have that background. With weaving, you kind of have to be in a certain place in your life to do it. And I think spiritually, physically, mentally and emotionally, it's not something you just get up and do. It's a highly spiritual thing. So, the students that we're teaching, they're already at that point and they gravitate to us. We don't seek them out.

CHIEF JANICE GEORGE: There are a lot of people, in a lot of different disciplines in the culture, and in the tradition that are keeping their expertise and teaching what they know. There are a lot of other communities that are weaving as well. We're happy to go to other nations to teach. In Squamish, we had weavers in the early 1900s, also Stó:lō were doing weaving. In the 1970s and 1980s the Matsqui picked it up. We started teaching in 2004 and that's when the whole revival began.

There is amazing significance in working with other nations and weaving it all together. It's our people working together as we traditionally did. We had to work together for the times that our people went through. And as far as I know, it's the first time that these nations have worked together on a major piece. The feeling is very good and I'm so happy to be working with the other weavers.

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARADISE HAS MANY GATES AT VANIER PARK

BUDDY JOSEPH: Yeah, for myself it means a lot, and feels like a full circle. To be able to convene on Vanier Park, that's pretty significant. It's a central area for the three nations to come together. I can't wait to see that day, which is not too far off. Again, looking at our history and talking to my uncles, borders really are a foreign concept to us. We didn't have borders back in the day. Our people shared art, traded, and had commerce. And so we're kind of getting back to that, sharing knowledge with each other. This brings

us full circle with the Tsleil-Waututh, which is terrific. It's a positive step too with the prayer rugs and working with the Biennale.

Mosques represent prayer. That's what they are. And that's part of our philosophy too—these things live on. They don't die out, negative or evil, or whatever you want to call it, darkness. It might've sat in here for a while in our area here, but we can move it out.

You can't kill it, but you can move it out of here. You can bring in the light and you can bring in the positive energy. And to me, that's what weavings are about.

There's a lot of work to do in other communities to share this knowledge. We've gone to Sechelt and Sliammon, Chemainus Bay, and Lummi Nation out in Washington State, and Stó:lō. It's giving those nations the opportunity to claw back their history, knowledge and teachings. We don't profess to know what their history is. We encourage those students to go talk to their elders and see what they can find out about their own nations.

Do you decide on the designs together?

CHIEF JANICE GEORGE: We do. A lot of the time we decide on designs together, and especially for this one. It came at a time that was so critical for Vancouver. It was summertime and there was a lot of smoke in Vancouver from the forest fires [in 2018]. The beaches were closed because the water was not clean enough to swim in. And, Telequah, the whale, her baby died. She was carrying her baby around on her nose for three weeks or so until the baby just disintegrated and fell into the depths of the ocean.

Whales are very significant to our people, when our ancestors come back they come as whales. So, I was feeling very heartbroken and I was scared because it was hard to breathe at the time. Knowing that my grandchildren couldn't swim at the beach, it was really sad times, really hard times. I think it'll go down in history as one of the worst times in my life, being afraid of not being able to breathe properly. That was the main thing on my mind as we started weaving.

BUDDY JOSEPH: Mm-hm. It's like the weaving we're doing for the Biennale—it's a snapshot of summer 2018, representing the state of our environment here. The plume that we had in the ocean, the forest fires, and Telequah and her baby whale. That's how we looked at it as we collaborated on a pattern. We primarily do collaborations. We'll look at the person that's requesting a weaving and ask them if they have anything in mind, like colours, and if they don't, then something will come to us. We profess that what you see here exists in this spirit world and manifests itself in this room as we weave it. Some of our students talk about this. This one student said that her mother came to her in a dream and showed her a pattern. So, she remembered it and weaved it.

It's part of our worldview that our ancestors always reach here, even when we're weaving. We cover our weavings overnight as we were taught by the elders to do. We believe that during the day when we're weaving, the ancestors might be here, but they're standing back. At night, if we don't cover it, they will want to touch it. As our teacher told us, "it's not for them." And so, in our first nations worldview, covering it with a blanket, that's like protection for this side. They can't touch this side. So, you'll see things covered.

ON THE POEM

CHIEF JANICE GEORGE: To me, the poem on the borders, it could be the story of our long houses. It's very powerful and it just touches my heart because our ancestors went through the very same thing. And in a way all our peoples, all people of color, go through these things. These things still happen today in this place we call the civilized world. I feel like we don't respect each other. We have to teach people to respect each other.

It's also important to me to name our experiences out loud. To tell people what our people have been through, and that we've blossomed as a people, all of us have. We have all carried a lot of things through time and a lot of pain as well. And to be here, the way we are now, shows the strength of all people. All people have this foundation that we're standing on. That's what the message is to me and I feel so honored to be part of that.

BUDDY JOSEPH: I love the poem. It feels as if the First Nations and those of Muslim faith have been existing in parallel and now, we crossed paths. It says that what's in here (puts hand on heart) can't be killed. Despite attempts to extinguish it, it's not going to happen. It's a very similar message to ours, especially our recent history. We've been able to hang on to a lot of our customs, our language, spirituality, and our worldview. It wasn't killed off. Now we always hold up our hands to our ancestors to honour that they were able to hang on.

They went underground to keep it alive. The message of the poem, at least for us, is "we're still here and we're not going anywhere."

What are your current projects?

BUDDY JOSEPH: As time has gone on, we've evolved, and it's turned into something bigger and now the Biennale is part of it. We've done a lot of presentations, a lot of instruction to the general public, and what our students are telling us is: "get this message out to the world, tell others about our worldview and how we've managed to survive in this world." I think one of our strengths and one of the things that means so much to us is that we never left our land. We've stayed here. Everything we've got starts with the land. With every nation, it's like that. Our spirituality, nutrition, our spiritual stories, our sacred places.

CHIEF JANICE GEORGE: For me right now, at this time in our life, and this time of our weaving career, this project feels like the high point where we get to work with other nations and other people. We get to talk about what it means to us to be weavers, what it means to share weavings with the world, and what the weavings mean. And find out that a lot of times you have more in common than differences. And I love that part of it. I love learning about each other and sharing what we all collectively know. That's very powerful. I hope it travels around so we can pass that message on to other people in the world. It's bigger than all of us.

RUTH SCHEUING AND MARY LOU TRINKWON

WEAVERS OF THE JACQUARD BORDER WEAVING

ON THE DESIGN OF THE BORDER

RUTH: There is the text, *Threads Through Time*. The bottom row has the text all in different languages (Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh, and then English).

MARY LOU: The square Kufic text on the border is an important piece because it's brings together the context of all the people that worked on it. The name and concept we developed collaboratively when we came up with that title, *Threads Through Time*, as peoples all coming together on the land. We're in Vanier Park where it's going to be housed temporarily.

I see the border as bringing that all together in an embrace. We will stitch it together to be the container that holds all those people, and all those ideas.

RUTH: To me, the meaning in the Kufic text is very interesting. It connects the issues, even though the issues are specific to each people, they do translate, because the same issues have happened over different centuries.

MARY LOU: And Ajlan's original title *Paradise Has Many Gates* allows for disparate thinking and different peoples to come together through a humanity portal in a way, that's how I interpret that we can all go through the same portal, even though we're culturally very different.

RUTH: The way I see it is this was a kind of "tour de force" for us. The loom is sort of a semi-industrial loom and we're not really equipped to use it- Mary-Lou is more equipped. Most people, when they have Jacquard looms, they just leave the [warp] threads and space them in one way, and they always weave the same thing. This kind of forced us to really move the loom. We can weave 40 inches wide where normally we wove 24. We knew our weaving needed to be wider and thicker (we normally do thin yarnage with thin fabric). So, it really pushed us, not only to work with the thick yarn but also to work tonally. We didn't need to be loud. Mostly, we tend to work in black and white to create contrast. We knew we needed to do something subtle, but it still needed to be readable. It's interesting to see that it really pops.

ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WEAVING AND TEXTILE ARTS

RUTH: I've taught weaving, and I've been a weaver, since the early 1980s, I think. I was really influenced by the whole history of women and Greek mythology connected to weaving. Penelope weaved and Arachne weaved. And Arachne was punished for challenging a goddess in her weaving, and then she was turned into a spider. Weaving is a language that women specifically contributed to and I see weaving as

storytelling. Text and textiles are connected, like a language.

Weaving is always a digital process, not just computer weaving. Everything you do, you do it by hand and pick up threads in tapestry and we just do it, it's mechanical.

MARY LOU: And a mathematical one. It's the same with the weavings that Indigenous weavers do. It's all math and geometry—everything fits together very precisely. And tension. Tension is very important.

When Ruth and I worked together at Capilano University, I taught print, dye, and surface design. When the textile program there was cancelled, Ruth bought the Jacquard loom. I joined in with her and started weaving. I had done Jacquard weaving a few years before, but not really as my main studio practice. I came to it just as a miracle, really. But for myself, my artistic practice, isn't so embedded, as it is with Ruth. I found with the Jacquard loom that I'm doing a lot more commissions for other artists. I feel like it's my work, but I do realize that there is a lot of history. And certainly, I had a conversation with Debra Sparrow yesterday about the whole ceremony, spirituality, and worldview aspect of it. And I've learned that also from Chief Janice George and Buddy Joseph about their weaving and how embedded it is in their culture.

For my historical connection, my grandmother worked in a mill in the north of England, probably in the late 1800's. I imagine it was dangerous, horrible, and hard. And she never spoke to anybody in the family about it, really. That means I have a connection in my family too, to the loom.

I feel like I'm in service to the loom. I work for other people, but in my own weaving practice, I don't use a Jacquard loom, but a regular harness loom.

RUTH: This is great. I'm glad you touched on this. We work well as a team. When I tell people I'm a weaver, people tend to think of the ancient things, like the Romantics and the past. I'm really interested in textiles that are grounded in real life. And I like being here at MakerLabs because there's a balance here of people who are techies, but who also really respect the handmade, like learning welding and basic skills.

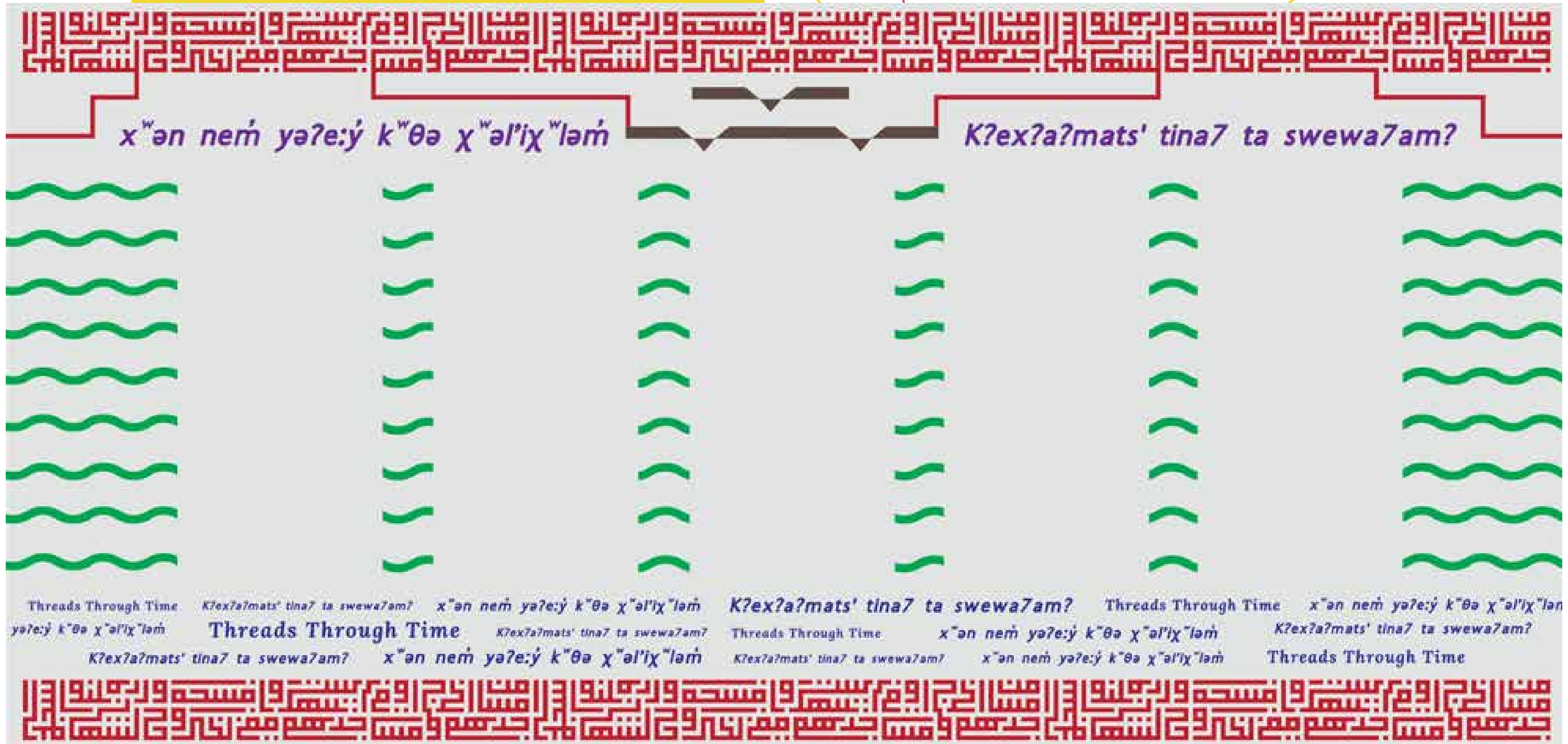
I feel the loom is the same. You have to have technical knowledge and it's a skill, but it's not really in the past. Industrial revolution was mostly driven by textiles. It's a semi-industrial loom so it has both of these aspects. The Industrial Revolution was very bad for many people.

ON THE POEM

MARY LOU: The first things I think about are resilience and defiance. Which, in the poem, it speaks to rebuilding of the mosques that were torn down and the resilience of the people who are still going to go in them. In terms of the whole Reconciliation project that's happening; it is a way to be resilient against the backdrop of colonial violence. To come forward and say we're in this together and how are we going to move forward? Well, we're going to endeavor to co-create art, which is what we're doing here, to bring all these people together on this land here. The Indigenous people were exiled from Canada even though they weren't physically removed. There are a lot of similarities with the poem.

RUTH: Yes. I think I always felt it was important to have both, given that it was going into a mosque, it needed to have something that tied First Nations to the mosque. That's why I wanted somebody like [Doaa Jamal] to design it. And then the Kufic language is just fascinating for me because we had a lot of talks about how it works in reading. We talked about it being a geometric language.

MARY LOU: I think that's interesting too (when thinking about the shared land) is that as much as the powers that be would have us believe that we're different, we have far more similarities than we do differences.



DOAA JAMAL

— GRAPHIC DESIGNER, BORDER WEAVING

ON THE DESIGNING PROCESS

DOAA: It's being conscious. I don't know how to explain it. It's just... being conscious of what you're doing right now. And it just happens. You don't go *"Oh, I have step one, step two, step three..."* It just happens in your mind.

ON THE DESIGN

DOAA: I The design on the border is square Kufic script, which is Arabic calligraphy script, but it does look like a pattern and it's used in a lot in buildings and architecture as a visual element. Some people wouldn't be able to read it and they think it's just a pattern, but you can decipher it to read it and to see what it says. You might see this style a lot, spelling words that say Allah, God, or Mohammed the Prophet. You'll see it in mosques and I think the mosques on Canada Way also have a pattern like this on the outside. The pattern basically reads the poem [by Efemeral] but using Kufic script. It's Arabic and it's not easy to read, but if you tried to trace it, you'll be able to.

The reason why I didn't want to use traditional, cursive calligraphy was because I didn't want people to see it and be like, *"Oh, okay, this is Arabic. I can't read it and I'll just put it away,"* and disassociate. By incorporating it as a pattern, people will be more likely to ask about it.

For the border, I really wanted to create something that would unify the piece. I had to think *"how do I combine all of these thoughts from the other weavers and the artists that were making the borders, and try to translate that onto this piece?"*

I didn't know what the other weavings looked like in advance, but I definitely knew that there will be a lot of bright and bold colors. So, we agreed to make the prayer rug white with the light gray for the patterns, the border, and the phrases. By keeping the colors simple, it gives the weavers a chance to express their ideas the way they want to in the rug, without being limited or being worried about the piece not fitting into the bigger border weaving. You don't want design details that are too fine because it will be light gray and white. That's not a lot of contrast, but you've got to create something that brings together the whole piece.

Initially I was a bit skeptical about trying to illustrate or represent other cultures because I didn't know much about Indigenous culture in Canada.

I think adding [the Kufic text] border put me at ease because that's something where I can offer my input and feel that I know exactly what I'm doing. I was very confident while doing the border because I knew exactly how it should be said. It created a balance of feeling confident about specific areas of this project but also acceptance of feeling less confident in other areas. This all happens from the moment I'm working on a draft to sending it off, and wondering *"is this good? Is this doing any harm in any way?"* And getting feedback for that.

Did you do a lot of revisions or...

DOAA: A little bit, style-wise. Yeah. Actually, one challenge was the characters/ alphabet of the

Being Muslim
Workshop, 2018

Indigenous languages because it was hard to find fonts for them. Not every font had these special characters, so I have to hand-letter some of them and make it look it's the same font. That was a learning curve as well. The artists would give me the translation, and I had to write it down, put it in Illustrator, and make it into a vector and then transfer it to the prayer rug design and make it look like a piece of the typeface.

ON THE POEM

DOAA: When I read the poem, I got goosebumps like, "*This is too real.*" It reflects what is happening right now with the terror attack [in Christchurch, New Zealand, March 2019], but also the Islamophobia that is happening in Canada. Nobody is willing to address it because people think: "*No, we're in Canada. We are a multicultural country, and we love everybody.*" It just really captured what is it feels like to be a Muslim.

It also resonated with me because even in the Muslim community, you can feel the division in a sense that every sector of Islam will have their own mosque, or they'll have their own gathering and traditions, which is pretty cool, but we're also missing the community part of "*we are all Muslims*" at the end of the day. And we should really be welcoming to everybody, Muslims specifically, because I feel the same way where I'm not accepted in a specific sector of Islam because I don't do specific things. I have friends that follow that sector, but I still cannot celebrate Eid with them in the same mosque where they celebrate.

So, I felt that resonated with my life, that I could create my own community for Muslims who don't strictly follow any specific sector. Like you're getting, in a way, forced to get out of this community that's very strict in beliefs and values but then you get out of there and you create your own. So, that for me was the biggest representation of that poem.

I feel like for Indigenous people, I imagine that the poem applies in a sense that they've been exiled off their land into a smaller land that are called reserves, and told: "*this is what you should be thankful for.*" This whole land is theirs, but there can be a sense of entitlement when collectively living on this land.

EFEMERAL

EFEMERAL: Working with this project really reflects the time that we are in. The night that Doaa [Jamal] asked me to write the poem happened to be the night where, here in our Pacific time, we were starting to hear about the terror attack that happened in Christchurch [New Zealand, in March 2019]. I think that my poetry is observational, and it helps me process what's going on in my life. This poem particularly, was written in light of what was happening in New Zealand, as a reaction to the terror attack, but also trying to incorporate what Doaa explained to me about the project.

ON THE PROCESS

EFEMERAL: I think that the question of land is really important here. Recognizing that we're on unceded territory and what that means to create space on a territory that's been taken and where lives have been taken. We live in a space where people don't recognize the implications of what that means for land, for space, for lives to have been stolen and continue to be stolen. The poem talks about rebuilding, honoring, and finding sacredness in light of exile and martyrdom. How do you do that when exile and martyrdom continue to happen and are perpetuated constantly? Where does that expanse exist for Indigenous people? And for people who are migrants who have come to this land seeking expanse, what does it mean to be in a space that has been taken from another people?

It's really complicated, and I think that as immigrants, it's really important to consider. Muslims have a very long history in Canada, pre-Confederation. And so, how do we navigate our role in what's happening to Indigenous people? And how do we create expanse for the rebuilding of sacred space? I think before we even talk about sharing land, there must be a recognition of what's happened and what's continuing to happen. The onus is on us, as people who have settled here. I think there's a lot to be said about how this connects with the current context here on the West Coast [Vancouver]. But whether it's here, or in Quebec City with the massacre that happened there, or on Maori territory in New Zealand, there are certainly connections.

ON WRITING THE POEM IN ARABIC

EFEMERAL: Yeah, I wrote it in Arabic. That's actually an important part of the process: the fact that I originally wrote it in Arabic. I tried to write it in English at the beginning (and I don't think that's to say that it's my mother tongue, but I express myself with most ease in English) but for some reason, this poem refused to come out in English, which I think is interesting. It was just easier to write in Arabic, the words flowed more easily. The Arabic translates, in English, to "*they were exiled from their mosques and in their mosques, martyred. So, in the expanse of their exile and martyrdom, they built a mosque.*"

I was referencing what had happened in New Zealand. But more importantly, the poem honors those who rebuild. Those who, in the face of unspeakable terror, horror, and tragedy are able to find faith and hope and are able to rebuild sacred space and sanctuary for themselves and for their people. You can take the word "mosque" literally but you could also see it as spaces of sanctuary and of community. And mosques are big buildings, but what is a building without the people that inhabit it, right? What is a mosque without community? Honoring the people is what I was going for in the design of the border weaving, in light of New Zealand and in light of Quebec (February 2019) and thinking about where I am, here in this world today.

There is a phenomenon that's been talked about in North America, that I think that the Muslim-American community is far more vocal in exploring; about exiles that happen within. A recent film, called "Unmosqued" talked about this phenomenon of people being "unmosqued" and not being able to enter spaces. So, I think that the chain-link mosque [Paradise has Many Gates] at Vanier Park, that the prayer mats are going to be in, also speaks to that idea but in a different context. The Saudi context is very different, but fundamentally they all beg the question "*what is a mosque without the people? What is it but walls?*"

There's a concept within our culture and I can't even remember exactly where it stems from, but it's the idea that a human life, and all that it signifies and means, is more valuable to God than the *Kaaba*. Let the *Kaaba* be destroyed rather than have a human soul, a human heart, a human life, suffer. So how do you fit that into the idea of mosques in sacred spaces and holding people and holding community as sacred as opposed to just the buildings that house us?

I think that there are subtleties in every language, right? And so, for me, when you think of the word martyr, for instance, right? In English, it's so archaic. It's heavy. Nobody really uses it anymore. If you think in Arabic, the word *shahid*, it has a different meaning, and it connects to the idea of witnessing, which for me is fascinating. What does that even mean for someone to be a witness and be a martyr? Your *Shahada* is your testimony because you are a witness. So, the complexity of the Arabic language, I couldn't express what I wanted to express with martyr? It doesn't have the same... The sound, it didn't sound right.

Also, *fusha* just means so much more to me than the English translation "expanse." You can even hear it in the word, fusha. There's an air... Like a breath of air that happens. And you can breathe when you're in a space of expansion. I think even etymologically, expanse, the *EX* at the beginning might even have to do with "outside."

When I'm writing poetry, sound is important. Historically, poetry has been of oral tradition. It wasn't written. Sound is really important. And with my poem being a commentary on what I'm experiencing and what I'm processing, that process and that experience happened to me in Arabic. Language is so fascinating for me: words can hold so much.

PARADISE HAS MANY GATES

By Ajlan Gharem

The installation that inspired Threads Through Time.

Created from chain link fence, this artwork can evoke feelings of imprisonment and anxiousness by way of its caged structure. By designing the structure in the form of a mosque, an Islamic sacred and community space, young Saudi Arabian artist Ajlan Gharem questions the role of religion in society, especially amongst a younger generation for whom ideas and knowledge are valued over traditional religious and spiritual beliefs.

In a world of mass migration and refugee crises, this artwork invites us to think about the role of fences as physical and psychological deterrents that can isolate and divide people and ideas. Is this mosque, located in one of the most multicultural cities in the world, inviting us all, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, to see through what traditionally divides us and look toward creating experiences that will unite us?

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Aslam Bulbulia

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, CENTRE FOR COMPARATIVE MUSLIM STUDIES

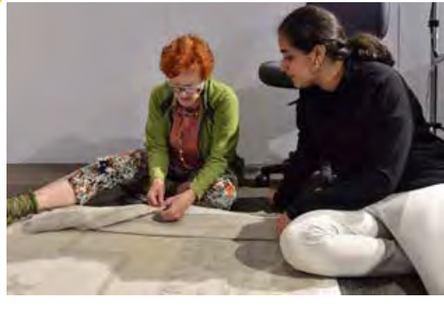
The first time I heard a land acknowledgement was at a City of Vancouver event in late 2016, a few weeks after moving to Vancouver from South Africa. A story came to mind, about the famous Hadith scholar, Imam Nawawi, who is said to have passed away at a young age because he wouldn't eat food grown around Damascus. His understanding was that the land around the city was unceded. It was supposed to be a *Waqf*, a public land trust, but it was taken into private ownership. He reasoned that food grown on this land was not permissible for him to eat, so he relied on dried fruit and supplies his father would send from his hometown. According to Imam Nawawi's reasoning, to be a Muslim on unceded land has major spiritual implications.

How can Muslims make their presence on this land permissible? It's a question I've been wrestling with since that day. Most Muslims coming to Canada have immigration journeys that are filled with gratitude for a new home. These journeys are sometimes an escape from homeland traumas and are full of promise for new opportunities - not dissimilar from previous white settlers. The narrative that is often hidden, is that we're settling on someone else's land.

This project was an attempt to bridge that gap. It brought together Muslim and Indigenous weavers, had them learn from one another, connect with one another's traditions and practices, and connect on the land. As I've come to learn more about the Indigenous people of this land, the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh. I've come to learn about being in good relationship, and about protocol and ceremony. The handover showed a path towards decolonization.

The handover of the weavings by the Coast Salish artists in the *Paradise has Many Gates* installation was not just a community event in a park, it was a signal of what might be possible for our communities in the future. When we shift away from colonial "reconciliation" notions, existing solely between the state and Indigenous communities, new futures emerge. This moment signalled to me that building good relationships can be done as individual to individual, and community to community. We can examine our personal and spiritual motivations, our understandings of being on this land, and find new ways to engage in ceremony and protocol to establish better relationships with the people whose land we're on.

As this project tours, I believe it will inspire hope, self-reflection and the question: What am I doing to make my presence on this land right? What commitments help restore, rebuild, recognize the true history of this land and imagine a new future together - one that is decolonial, connects us to ourselves, one another, and the land we're on. I also hope that this project steps towards the decolonization of public art itself. That pieces aren't about beautification, increasing neighbourhood desirability, or centering the expressions of an individual artist. But instead, it becomes a means for the collective healing of old wounds and building new shared futures.



STITCHING CEREMONY

In the days leading up to the Unveiling Ceremony in Vanier Park on June 27, 2019, the individually woven pieces of the 31 x 15-foot, large border weaving came together in a **Stitching Ceremony** at the Museum of Vancouver.

Between the 24th and 27th of June, the weavers and other textile artists engaged in free-form dialogue while stitching together these woven panels.The public was invited to visit and share their stories, in celebration of this intercommunity exchange.

ABOUT THE BIENNALE

The Vancouver Biennale is a non-profit charitable organization that exhibits great art in public space, creating a catalyst for learning, community engagement, dialogue, and social action. Its mission is to make Public Art accessible, engaging, and motivating to create vibrant and inspired communities. It was founded with a vision to transform the image of Vancouver as a city solely prized for its outdoor recreational lifestyle supported by spectacular natural beauty, to one of a vibrant urban community where great art in public places is a reflection of our cultural diversity. With each exhibition the focus has been on fulfilling its mandate of transforming public space and redefining neighbourhoods where people live, work, play, and transit.

VANCOUVER BIENNALE

SPECIAL THANKS

The Vancouver Biennale would like to thank:

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CEREMONY DRUMMERS:
Gabriel George, Nick George, Damian George jr., SwoWo Gabriel, Denzel Baker, Alec Dan

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Aslam Bulbulia, Muhammad Asadullah, Rahat Kurd, Itrath Syed, Dr. Amal Ghazal (and her 12 students), Maged Senbel, Sarah Munawar, Mustaali Raj, Lina Abouzaid, Shabnam, Nadia

WORDS FROM COORDINATOR

Coordinating the *Weaving Cultural Identities* and *Threads Through Time* projects has not been without its challenges. It was during the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Vancouver, Canada that the projects were set to tour. Uncertainty and social isolation were at an all-time high. When the city was shut down and the work-from-home mandate was implemented, public transit options became a perilous journey. And so, the office became my temporary home, and the weavings were my roommate.

My days were spent packing and repacking, knowing that participating venues could cancel at any moment for lockdown. With all the uncontrollable unknowns, the only option left was to persevere. My determination was only strengthened by being the caretaker of these weavings, and my resolve was to ensure that the artists' stories were ready to be shared with audiences beyond Vancouver. This intimate relationship with the weavings revealed to me the core teachings of *Threads Through Time*, which are resilience, compassion, and connection – an incredibly timely message during these unprecedented times.

I inherited this role as the Coordinator/ Caretaker of the *Weaving Cultural Identities* projects when I was unfamiliar with the communities that it represents. Through learning and discovery, I came to understand the creative generosity that exists through collaboration and friendship between seemingly disparate cultures. As you, the reader, come across this publication, I hope it will imbue in you a sense of strength during vulnerable moments, and I hope that it will inspire you to contribute to a world where commonalities are shared and learned from, and where [illegible] rated.

LORI LAI
Touring Exhibition Coordinator
Vancouver Biennale
October 2020

IDEAS TO CONSIDER

- In a contemporary, global society of mixed cultures and values, how do we begin to navigate heritage and diverse beliefs?
- Across cultures and centuries, how have you seen religion and spirituality shape artists and their designs or artworks? How is it evident in this project?
- What can we learn from personal reflection of our ancestral histories, and what can we learn from each other within a contemporary project like this?
- What similarities and connections do you see in this exhibition and among seemingly different communities and traditions. What unites us?
- How do you think cultural exchanges between Indigenous and immigrant communities play a role in reconciliation in Canada?
- Weaving can be a form of sharing and passing down knowledge, a form of storytelling, developing and expressing identity. Where have woven items or favorite textiles been meaningful in your life, your family or your cultural experience?
- Look closely as you walk around the space. Which weaving catches your eye the most? What commonalities can you see amongst these cultural weaving styles and patterns?

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