

Creating Space: Trent Students Showcase Indigenous Culture

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A hand-painted canoe, custom-made powwow jackets, and a beadwork map: Trent artists making news



Tia Cavanagh, photo credit Joon Kim

There's a canoe at the corner of Water and King Streets in downtown Peterborough, though it's not waiting to be paddled. It's an art installation by Anishinaabe artist, and Trent Masters student, Tia Cavanagh, at the *Jiimaan'ndewemgadnong* (The Place Where the Heart of the Canoe Beats) Pocket Park. It's just one of a number of creative projects by Trent students helping to make Indigenous culture more public.

Ms. Cavanagh, who is currently pursuing her M.A. in Canadian and Indigenous Studies, says she used the canoe as a "storytelling device," hand painting it inside and out to honour the original peoples of the area and to pay tribute to place. The canoe's interior is painted with all the major waterways and lakes of Treaty 20 territory. She thinks that the location of the installation — within earshot of the water cascade at Millennium Park and close to the Otonabee River — will help passersby connect with the work. As an artist it's important for her to present work in this kind of public space.

"It allows for a story to be out in the open, and it's a celebration as well," says Ms. Cavanagh. "There's a certain kind of strength in that — that kind of reminder of resiliency and presence is a great counter narrative to colonialism. But it's more about being present and sharing and bringing everyone into that story. We're all part of it."

Rebecca Lyon is an Anishinaabe-Lebanese Ph.D. student at Trent whose recent project is also public — and wearable. Inspired by a dream, she created a be-ribboned powwow jacket based on traditional regalia, but made from thrifted fabrics and "upcycled" denim. One eye-catching jacket led to another, and soon her jackets were making [news](#) — and gaining a following on [Instagram](#).

Also making news is a [beaded map of Turtle Island/North America](#) that includes Cree-Métis Trent student Marissa Magneson's beaded interpretation of the province of Ontario. The project, begun as a way of inspiring Indigenous beaders to collaborate during the pandemic, reveals a diversity of cultural influences and beading styles.

Professor David Newhouse, chair of the Chanie Wenjack School of Indigenous Studies, notes that the creative output of Indigenous cultures has historically been suppressed, but that the work of these Trent-connected artists is helping to counter that.

"The creativity and innovation remained invisible, overwhelmed in the public view by the impact of colonialism," says Prof. Newhouse. "Our program fosters this creativity and encourages our students to express it in as many ways as possible and to make it visible. I'm proud of these three artists who are doing that."