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Heather Shillinglaw
The Art Gallery of St. Albert

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HEATHER SHILLINGLAW

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About the Cover Image

P'U>A.3 Śb"Ab3 kîsitêpowin sâkâhikan cooking lake from series LFJah"Cb3 dĊÁ.0 mâmitonêyihcikan kotâwîw my mind digs in the soil like a turtle presents twelve stunning art quilts stitched on elk hide. Heather Shillinglaw, a mixed-media artist of Appetogasan, Cree/Dene, Salteaux Chipewyan, and Scottish/French heritage, captures aerial views of Lac St. Anne, Cooking Lake, the Edmonton River Valley, alongside many more. These lands are where her ancestors lived and travelled, where they hunted, gathered medicines, told stories, and taught future generations.

Tufting, beading, and embroidery reveal the richness of the natural world. Looking closely at the land itself, the works present beautiful spheres of knowledge that celebrate Indigenous worldviews. Hours spent in conversation with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and family members blend with cultural knowledge, as well as Shillinglaw's archival and ethnobotanical research. Top stitched across the surface of each piece is the poetry of Métis Elder Marilyn Dumont, beautifully sharing hard truths and painful histories.¹

Image used with permission of the artist.

¹ From the Galleries West exhibition notes.

HEATHER SHILLINGLAW, Appetogasan, Cree/Dene, Salteaux Chipewyan, and Scots/French, looked to her Awas Nohkoms (Grandmothers before) for guidance by contemplating the bush for healing, life, and sustainability. They carried all they owned, balancing their lives within the landscape and following the buffalo.

Shillinglaw aspires to make art to honour them, listening to the sage advice by Elders and Knowledge Keepers inclusive of working with anthropologists of the South American Indigenous tribes: Maputches and Guarani medicine women. This cultural sharing, combined with historians and scholars to make art, blends concepts of body, mind, and spirit to weave messages through her practice. Her experiences weave ideas of design beadwork, materials painting, sewing, and sculpture, involving a milieu of ideas to convey multiple messages.

Art evolves in Heather's storytelling and re-telling of familial oral histories. Paramount to her practice is sharing knowledge through art in workshops and school programs, using land-based philosophies and narration to help students create their masterpiece. In her instructional studio practice, she teaches her own philosophy called MEAM: "Métis Ecological Arts Message" as another layer of land-based learning methods. Heather is currently employed by The Art Gallery of St. Albert in Alberta as the Indigenous Visual Arts Programmer. Her dream is to bring this message throughout the community on a continuing basis.

An image from P/U>A· ŚĠ″Ab kîsitêpowin sâkâhikan cooking lake from series LFJ¬J″fb dĊÁ· mâmitonêyihcikan kotâwîw my mind digs in the soil like a turtle will also be featured on the cover of Marilyn Dumont's volume of selected works Reclamation and Resistance: The Poetry of Marilyn Dumont, available from the Laurier Poetry Series with Wilfrid Laurier University Press in April 2024.