

Journeys, Merged Objects, and Public Art: Situating Practices of Salish Weaving as Research-Creation

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Dans l'histoire de l'art, les textiles autochtones coutumiers ont été ignorés en tant qu'artisanat domestique « traditionnel » et objets fonctionnels. Axé sur la documentation du tissage salish depuis les années 1960 et sur l'intégration des méthodologies de recherche autochtones et non autochtones, cet essai explorera la résurgence du tissage salish en tant que forme salish de recherche-création. Dans cet essai, une approche féministe autochtone centre l'expérience des tisserands salish pour changer les perceptions du tissage salish et pour déstabiliser les omissions structurelles dans les discours de l'art autochtone. Les tissages et les pratiques du tisserand deviennent visibles en tant que sites de partage des connaissances intergénérationnelles, d'innovation, de relations sociales complexes et de continuité.

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"The layers of difficulty in bridging cultural paradigms within research most often begin at the level of individual word choice." —Kovach, 2009¹

Introduction

In the 1986 exhibition catalogue for *Hands of our Ancestors*, University of British Columbia (UBC) Museum of Anthropology (MOA) curator Elizabeth Johnson and archaeologist Kathryn Bernick celebrated x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) blanket weavers, noting how "[t]he people responsible for the revival taught themselves, studying examples of old weavings and questioning elders to learn whatever they remembered of the art."² Since the 1960s, twentieth-century Salish weavings have appeared in public and institutional spaces as art installations, creating a new mode of making this ancient form visible in the unceded and occupied traditional territories of Halq'eméylem-speaking Stó:lō peoples, the hənqəmínəm-speaking x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) and səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples, and the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.³ However, the revitalization of Salish blanket weaving is usually spoken of as a form of cultural renewal, rather than as a research activity, by practitioners and scholars documenting the resurgent practices.⁴ Yet archival research, oral traditions, interviews, and hands-on and high-technology material investigations have all played roles in the resurgence of Salish weaving on the Northwest Pacific Coast.⁵ The creative woven outputs contain the knowledge gathered by weavers combining Salish ways of being in the world and non-Indigenous academic research processes. If research-creation is an enduring activity rather than an emergent one in the late twentieth century, Johnson and Bernick's words offer an entry point to trace its longstanding presence in Salish weaving practices.

My essay will focus on how resurgent practices of Salish weaving occurring in Salish communities resonate with the concept of research-creation. Canada's federal funding body describes research-creation as:

An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (art forms).⁶

1. Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 21.

2. Elizabeth Johnson and Kathryn Bernick, *Hands of our Ancestors: The Revival of Salish Weaving at Musqueam* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986), 2.

3. Sharon Fortney, "In the Spirit of Reconciliation: Rethinking Collections and the Act of Engagement at the Museum of Vancouver," in *Unsettling Native Art Histories on the Northwest Coast*, ed. Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse and Aldona Jonaitis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), 154. Naming adopts the Museum of Vancouver's practice of identifying Indigenous peoples by language groups. Weavers continue to use "Salish weaving" and "Salish blankets" to identify their work.

4. I have chosen to use terms such as "customary," "historical," and "twentieth" or "twenty-first century" to describe/categorize Salish weavings, to avoid the traditional/contemporary binary. See America Meredith, "Why Categorizing Native Art as 'Traditional' and 'Contemporary' is Toxic," *First American Art*, *FAAZINE* (February 6, 2020), PDF, <https://firstamerican-artmagazine.com/traditional-contemporary/>.

5. This essay is focused on Stó:lō weavers in British Columbia (BC) in the 1960s who participated in the first documented resurgence of Salish weaving in Sardinia, BC, and on one art installation created by Squamish weavers in BC in 2009. Salish weaving is practiced by many Salish peoples around the Salish Sea and based on collections and memories—it has always been a diversified practice. Coast Salish territories and communities have also been disrupted by the imposition of the Canada-US border. Many families and communities continue to sustain ties regardless of the nation-state border. Salish weaving practices have resurged differently across Salish communities, and the Canada-US border has played a role in this, as it impairs the free movement of Salish peoples in their territories. Likewise, scholarship on Coast Salish weaving has been similarly divided along the Canada-US border. Although I cite scholarship from across Salish territories, my focus of analysis is within British Columbia and the lower mainland area.

6. Social Science and Humanities Research Council, "Definition of Terms: Research-Creation," Update 2021-05-04, web, <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#a22>.

7. Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Durham, NC:

What discourse is supposed in this dominant definition? The search for critiques of this emergent concept led me to Natalie Loveless's 2019 book, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto of Research-Creation*. Loveless's historiographical contextualization of research-creation analyzes "the ways that artistic practices come to be understood as research methods and outputs in university contexts, and the different ways that artistic practices with research bases ... have been codified since the 1990s."⁷ That codification has taken different forms in the past thirty years and situates research and creative activities in a hierarchy of knowledge, where traditional disciplinary approaches to research hold the highest value. The manifesto aims to "re-craft practices and pedagogy within university ecologies," critically addressing the structures, politics, and ethics of university institutions in which research-creation operates.⁸

Loveless' view of research-creation as a "critical interdisciplinary praxis," shifts it away from the limitations of a hierarchized integration of disciplinary research approaches toward its role as "a site of resistance and remaking [of] university spaces," problematizing the dominant discourse.⁹ Loveless also invokes Indigenous modes of scholarship found in the stories of Thomas King and Joanne Archibald as models of research-creation outputs that are "different *tangible forms of research*..." and positions them as "valid modes of rendering research public."¹⁰ I suggest that the same is true of the resurgence of Salish weaving, and of the weavers' deployment of their artworks as visible holders of knowledge in public spaces of art installation.

I will attend to how the re-emergence of Salish blanket weaving in Stó:lō territory in the 1960s and its situation as public art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries constitute the continuation of ancient knowledge systems that are capable of critically addressing settler-colonial institutions in the form of creative visual research products. I will speak to the historical situation of Salish weaving in the canon of Northwest Coast Indigenous Art; how the resurgence of Salish weaving took place the 1960s in British Columbia; and my encounter with an installation of Salish weaving in a Canadian university setting. Through analyzing the weavers' practices with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous theories and methods, I read Salish weaving's resurgence as a Salish approach to research-creation. Likewise, the use of the installation format, specifically in this instance, becomes visible as an Indigenous critique of relationships between systems of knowledge that reside in university institutions and enacts their potential "remaking."¹¹ I also use the term "resurgence" in alignment with Mississauga Nishnaabeg author Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's framing of radical resurgence that sustains the linkages of Indigenous cultural and political action.¹²

I argue that Salish knowledge systems include their own processes and modes of what Euro-American scholarship separately classifies as research and as creation. However, a paradox remains: how to uphold Salish weavings as having critical intellectual value without simply utilizing the Canadian academic hierarchical structures of knowledge—those that previously disregarded Indigenous ways of knowing—to present it as

research-creation.¹³ I aim to respect Salish knowledge through an understanding of Salish weaving as a mode of knowledge-making that pre-exists and is not defined by the dominant concept of research-creation, and to (re)situate Salish weavings as forms of critical Indigenous thought in art historical discourse.

Loveless discusses an idealized mode of research-creation as a form of “deep interdisciplinarity.”¹⁴ While that ideal alters perceptions of research and of creation, the notion of interdisciplinarity remains tethered to a Euro-Canadian compartmentalization of knowledge into discrete disciplines. Even with an aim to denaturalize disciplinary boundaries and counter the hierarchy between theory and practice, Western assumptions of natural separations between the activities of research and creation marks a profound difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous modes of research.

Shawn Wilson (Opasquiak Cree) analyses the experiences of Indigenous peoples with academic research and Indigenous ways of knowing in his 2008 book, *Research is Ceremony*. He foregrounds differences between knowledge systems in the forms of writing he deploys to establish new understandings of and respect for Indigenous research paradigms, or “the holistic use and transmission of information.”¹⁵ He reviews the historical application of academic research to Indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia, showing how it devalued Indigenous knowledge. Wilson cuts through the limitations of what is accepted as research activity and research products by universities with his introduction of an Indigenous research paradigm, one that operates through sets of interconnected relationships and processes that include the researcher’s whole being and actions to shape their research. The paradigm’s ethical basis is in its respect for multiple ontologies, reciprocity and engagement, and “relational accountability.”¹⁶ Abiding by the holistic and axiological principle of “fulfilling ... a role and obligations in the research relationship” is the basis of relational accountability, a critical component of that paradigm.¹⁷

Salish worldviews are similarly grounded in the importance of relationality. The scholarship of the late Deborah Jacobs (Snítelwet iy Siyámiya) brings a Skw̓wú7mesh (Squamish) worldview to the conceptualization of research-creation and how it may be evident in Salish weaving’s resurgence.¹⁸ Jacobs affirms a Squamish research paradigm when she evokes blankets and their role in ceremony as the basis of her research process, and as a metaphor of the enmeshment of Squamish people with place and with the land. Jacobs situates Squamish “upbringing and teachings” as the ground for all knowledge development through learning in community, which includes language, ceremony, oral histories and cultural practices that create a Skw̓wú7mesh way of being in the world.¹⁹ Jacobs theorizes a “skw̓wú7mesh praxis,” or “those acts that may change the skw̓wú7mesh world, inform the people, and commit them to action to revitalize... language and culture.”²⁰ This form of praxis existed prior to a Western conceptualization of “research-creation” in unceded Salish territory. Jacobs’

Duke University Press, 2019), 4, doi: 10.1215/9781478004646.

8. Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World*, 4–7, quotation 27.

9. Loveless, 41, 39.

10. Loveless, 24.

11. Ibid, 39.

12. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 48–50.

13. Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 17–19, 30, 43, 45–61; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London & New York: Zed Books, 1999), 61–80.

14. Simon Penny, “Rigorous Interdisciplinary Pedagogy: Five Years of ACE,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 15, no. 1 (February, 2009): 31–54, discussed in Loveless, 31.

15. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 7, 32.

16. Wilson, 58. Wilson cites communication by Evelyn Steinhauer and Cora Weber-Pillwax.

17. Wilson, 73, 77.

18. Deborah Jacobs (Snítelwet iy Siyámiya), “Skw̓wú7mesh Nách’én Xwech’shi7 t’l’a Nexwínew iy Snewíyelh - Squamish Praxis: the Interspace of Upbringing and the Teachings,” (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2016), <https://summit.sfu.ca/item/16887>.

19. Jacobs, “Squamish Praxis,” 77, 16–17, 31–33, 45.

20. Jacobs, 1.

21. Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (2013): 8–34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43860665>; Joanne Barker, "Indigenous Feminisms," in *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous People's Politics*, ed. José Antonio Lucero, Dale Turner, and Donna Lee VanCott (Oxford: Oxford Handbooks Online, 2015), 1–17, doi:10.1093/oxfordhdb/9780195386653.013.007.

22. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 39–40; Doreen Jensen, "Art History," in *Give Back: First Nations Perspectives on Cultural Practice*, ed. Maria Campbell (North Vancouver: Gallerie Publications, 1992), 15–26; Jaune Quick-to-See-Smith, "Give Back," in Campbell, *Give Back*, 61–72. I became aware of Salish weaving after moving to Vancouver in 2009. I am a descendant of settler families from Ireland, Scotland, and England who came to Saugeen Treaty 45 territory (near Guelph, Ontario) in the mid-nineteenth century, and I am grateful to live and work as an uninvited guest in unceded and occupied xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú-7mesh and səlifwətaʔ territory. Indigenous scholars such as Jensen and Quick-to-See-Smith, who also inform my approach, speak to the importance of forming reciprocal relationships and of building community.

23. Keith Thor Carlson and Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, *A Sto:lo Coast Salish Historical Atlas* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001), 1–3, 6–7, 21; Jordan Wilson, "Gathered Together: Listening to Musqueam Lived Experiences," *Biography (Honolulu)* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 470, doi:10.1353/bio.2016.0056. For excellent scholarship regarding Salish weavers in the US, see Barbara Brotherton, ed., *S'abadeb, The Gifts: Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre and Seattle Art Museum, 2008); Crisca Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar, Living by the River: Coast Salish Figures of Power* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999).

24. Wayne Suttles, "The Recognition of Coast Salish Art," in Brotherton, *S'abadeb: The Gifts*, 60–62; Paula Gustafson, *Salish Weaving* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd, 1980), 17–18. I use the term Salish throughout as it is more appropriate to the Stó:lō peoples and their networks of relationships that connect them with both inland (Interior) and coastal (Coast) relatives.

Skwxwú7mesh praxis as action for change resonates with the work of Loveless and Wilson, and is reciprocal research aimed at her community's well-being. By integrating the work of these scholars in a critical analysis of Salish weaving's resurgence, Salish weaving can be understood as a knowledge system and practice engaged in research *and* creation, without separation or hierarchy between these actions.

The conceptualization of Salish weaving and the knowledge it holds begins from within Salish epistemologies, and although I have not participated in that mode of experience, remaining cognizant of that conceptual difference creates a respectful distance, requiring pause and reflection in my process. As a settler scholar, I am conscious that my upbringing and education in settler-colonial institutions structures my experience. My research process reshapes my thinking, and is informed by Indigenous feminist theories that work to centre the lived experiences of Salish weavers.²¹ Respecting Salish weaving knowledge as being resonant with research-creation while not flattening the differences across knowledge systems also requires the adoption of what Shawn Wilson calls a "strategy of inquiry" to integrate Indigenous and non-Indigenous theories and methods.²² In what follows, I do not speak on behalf of any Salish weavers, and any errors or omissions are my own: I remain open to questions, correction, and advice.

Stó:lō, Skwxwú7mesh, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, and səlifwətaʔ† Unceded Territory

As described by Keith Carlson and Dr. Naxaxalhts'i (Albert 'Sonny' McHalsie, Stó:lō), and Jordan Wilson (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm), the uncaded lands surrounding the Salish Sea are deeply enmeshed with networks of Salish families that extend beyond the historically recent Canada-US border southward into Puget Sound, seaward into and along the east coast of Vancouver Island, northward into the mountainous terrain toward Whistler, British Columbia, and inland up the Fraser River valley [fig. 1].²³ The term "Coast Salish" (Salish) was externally imposed upon the Indigenous peoples in this region who are related through cultural practices and language families and who have lived as part of this land since time immemorial.²⁴ The imposition of nation-state borders and settler-colonial Canadian Reserve and US Reservation systems continue to disrupt Salish families and lifeways. The focus of this essay lies with the weaving work of Halq'eméylem (Stó:lō), Skwxwú-7mesh (Squamish), and hənqəmínəm (Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh) speaking peoples on whose uncaded lands the city of Vancouver and the surrounding region are situated. It is important to acknowledge that there are many Salish communities on both sides of the Canada-US border who are once again engaging with Salish weaving in differing ways, and that are focused on re-centering the practice in their communities.²⁵

"Merged Objects:" Salish Weaving

Salish weaving is an ancient and dynamic form of cultural production that was disrupted in the early nineteenth century. It is actively being (re)situated by Salish weavers and communities to its former status, once again



Figure 1. Map of Coast Salish territories © Deborah Reade. Original map by Deborah Reade for the Stonington Gallery with later modifications based on research by Barbara Brotherton for the Seattle Art Museum.

25. These three language groups and four nations comprise a small number of the peoples, nations and languages colonially identified as "Coast Salish." Salish weaving's resurgence has varied greatly across Salish territories and beyond the Canadian context that frames this paper. Salish weaving has also resurged in Skokomish territory with Twana speaking tribes, in the Lummi Nation, and elsewhere in Salish territories that are now understood to be in the United States. There are many additional communities, nations, and tribes who would identify as Coast Salish or Salish that are not discussed here. The essay is not intended as a comprehensive review of the resurgence of Salish weaving. For an excellent overview, see Crisca Bierwert, "Weaving in Beauty, Weaving in Time," in Brotherton, *S'abadeb: The Gifts*, 226–45.

26. Carolyn J. Marr, "A History of Salish Weaving: The Effects of Culture Change on a Textile Tradition," (master's thesis, University of Denver, 1979), 3–7.

27. Leslie H. Tepper, "Coast Salish Weaving—Preserving Traditional Knowledge with new Technology," *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge* 7, no. 1 (January 2008), 188–90; Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*; Sharon Fortney, "Identifying Sto:lo Basketry: Exploring Different Ways of Knowing Material Culture" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, March 2001), ii.

28. Salish two-bar looms incorporate a third floating bar, over which the warps are alternately wound. This allows a weaver to shift the weaving up or down as they weave. When the weaving is completed, the floating bar is pulled out and the warps remain uncut.

29. Liz Hammond-Kaarremma, "A Curious Clay: The Use of a Powdered White Substance in Coast Salish Spinning and Woven Blankets," *BC Studies* 189 (Spring 2016): 129–49, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/curious-clay-use-powdered-white-substance-coast/docview/1785947607/se-2>; Rick Schulting, "The Hair of the Dog: The Identification of a Coast Salish Dog-Hair Blanket," *Journal of Canadian Archaeology* 18 (1994): 57–67; Russel L. Barsh, Joan M. Jones, and Wayne Suttles, "History, Ethnography, and Archaeology of the Coast Salish Woolly Dog," in *Dogs and People in Social, Working, Economic or Symbolic Interaction*, ed. Lynn M. Snyder and Elizabeth A. Moore (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2006), 1–11; F.W. Howay, "The Dog's Hair Blankets of the



Figure 2. Salish blanket, collected before 1833. Wool, 150 x 127 cm. Cat. No. 1978.522. Copyright and courtesy Perth Museum & Art Gallery, Culture Perth & Kinross, Perth, Scotland.

becoming an integral part of everyday and ceremonial life in Salish societies [fig. 2]. Its dynamism also allows for Salish weaving to participate in society in new ways, in forms such as art.²⁶ Historically, Salish blankets were one form of creative output in a much larger cultural complex of weaving production. Made from a wide range of plant and animal materials, woven items included: wool and fibre garments, regalia, and tumplines; baskets, containers and garments made of cedar and grasses; reed mats for sleeping, bedding, and portable walls in longhouses; and fishing nets and weirs.²⁷

Blankets were usually woven by hand on a two-bar loom.²⁸ Preferential fibres for blankets included mountain goat wool and woolly dog hair (a now-extinct breed reared by Salish weavers for its long white hair).²⁹ Blankets ranged in form and colour, from solid white to multi-coloured with abstract geometric elements and designs. Both the materials and the designs were meaningful to their makers and wearers. Conceived of as wealth and connected with status, blankets continue to be important participants in ceremonial activities for namings, marriages, births, deaths, and for cementing relationships between individuals, families, and nations.³⁰

The range of design choices and materials are evident in historical collections and have differed throughout Salish territory over time and based on materials and the purpose of each blanket.³¹ Weavers continue to experiment with materials and the range of weaving practices and processes across the Salish communities previously mentioned are evidence of the nuances in the lineages of proprietary or privileged knowledge shared within families and in networks of relationships across families and communities, in the application of innovations, and in differing access to and trade in weaving materials. In the past decade, weavers such as Debra Sparrow, Angela George, hereditary chief Janice George and Willard (Buddy) Joseph have transformed their designs into large-scale murals in downtown Vancouver, and into building façades such as the new Vancouver Art Gallery.³²

Expert Squamish weaver Chepximiya Siyam' (hereditary chief Janice George) describes Salish blankets as "merged objects," embedded with material and metaphysical components of each weaver's practice. "The

Coast Salish," *The Washington Historical Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (Apr 1918): 83–92.

30. Leslie H. Tepper, Janice George, and Willard Joseph, *Salish Blankets: Robes of Protection and Transformation, Symbols of Wealth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), xii, 55–57; Gerald Bruce Subiyay Miller and D. Michael CHixapkaid Pavel, "Traditional Teachings about Coast Salish Art," in Brotherton, *S'abadeb: The Gifts*, 32–36; Bierwert, "Weaving in Beauty," 228–230.

31. Paula Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 37–63, 65–68; Bierwert, "Weaving in Beauty," 226–45; Tepper, George, and Joseph, *Salish Blankets*, 39–41; Katharine Dickerson, "Classic Salish Twined Robes," *BC Studies* 189 (Spring 2016): 109.

32. "Blanketing The City Series," Vancouver Mural Festival (website), 2018, <https://vancouvermuralfestival.ca/portfolio/blanketing-the-city/>; "Art Opens Understanding | Skwetsimeltxw Willard 'Buddy' Joseph and Chepximiya Siyam' Janice George," Vancouver Art Gallery, Nov. 4, 2021, YouTube video, <https://youtu.be/BTyMttZOyTg>.

33. Tepper, George, and Joseph, *Salish Blankets*, xiv, 134.

34. Tepper, George, and Joseph, 145–56; University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (MOA), *Musqueam Weavers Source Book*, Online PDF (2002), 20–84, <https://moa.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Source-books-Weavers.pdf>; Janice George in conversation with the author, April 17, 2023.

35. Bill Holm, *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1965); Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse, "Form First, Function Follows: The Use of Formal Analysis in Northwest Coast Art History," in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer, and Ki-Ke-In (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 406–13.

36. Megan Smetzer and Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse, "Working to Change the Tide: Women Artists on the Northwest Coast," in *Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists*, ed. Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Teri Greaves, exh. cat. (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Art and University of Washington Press, 2019), 259–72; Janet Catherine Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, *Native North American Art*, Second Edition (1998, repr.: New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 218–21; Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar*, 15.

37. Jisgang Nika Collison, "Stl'inll - Those with Clever Hands: Presenting Female Indigenous Art

object, the maker, the wearer and the community itself are bound and transformed through the creation and use of the Salish blanket."³³ Many weavers speak about the care and protection woven into Salish blankets, the roles blankets play as teachers, the connections they forge with ancestors, and the knowledge they hold: in Salish ontologies, woven blankets are complex entities that are more than their material beings or functional roles.³⁴

Salish Weaving and Northwest Coast Indigenous "Art" History

The popular view of Northwest Coast Indigenous art centres on spectacular items such as monumental carved and painted poles, masks, canoes, and bentwood boxes. The most well-known items are beautifully designed and executed in the abstract formline style practiced by northern groups such as the Xaad Kil and Xaayda Kil, Ts'msyen, and Hañtzaqv̓la speaking peoples (Haida, Tsimshian and Heiltsuk), and were famously formally analyzed in 1965 by art historian Bill Holm.³⁵ This image of the art production of the Pacific Northwest Coast is recent, and narrow compared to the actual depth and range of cultural and material practices.

The historical focus on northern formline design systems and carved wooden items omitted many other forms of cultural production in the region, a signal of the imposition of a colonial hierarchy of material production based in Euro-American/Canadian canons of art.³⁶ The practice of weaving was dismissed as women's domestic work in the gendered hierarchy of settler-colonialism that ran counter to the highly-respected roles Indigenous women held in their families and communities.³⁷ In settler-colonialism's gendered material object categorizations, Indigenous textiles, basketry, beadwork and garments were situated as functional domestic crafts, as were many forms of Indigenous women's creative production.³⁸

Indigenous cultural production was violently disrupted in the rise of settler-colonial assimilationism. In 1884 the Canadian federal government criminalized Indigenous cultural practices in the Indian Act, effectively decreasing the demand for the multitude of blankets that had formerly participated in potlatches and ceremonies. Other impacts on the production of Salish weavings include the introduction of trade blankets, and the increasing inaccessibility of local fibres and materials due to urbanization. The need to engage in waged labour decreased women's time for weaving, and the imposition of federal and provincial pass systems reduced the mobility of Indigenous women and curtailed their ability to gather and trade materials for weaving. Intergenerational knowledge transfer practices were ruptured by the forced attendance of Indigenous children at residential and day schools.³⁹ In place of their languages and eons of knowledge and pedagogy, the children were forced to speak English and were trained as farm and domestic labourers in service to the settler-colonial economy.⁴⁰

In the resurgence of their knowledge-bases since the mid-twentieth century, Salish weavers have also struggled against the layered and intersecting forms of marginalization and disregard encountered by Indigenous women-identified artists in an art system formed around a



Figure 3. Delegation of Salish leaders, British Columbia, 1906. Image PN 7789, courtesy of the Royal BC Museum.

and Scholarship," in Bunn-Marcuse and Jonaitis, *Unsettling Native Art Histories*, 96–101; Keith Thor Carlson (ed.), *You are Asked to Witness: The Stó:lō in Pacific Coast History* (Chilliwack, BC: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 1997), 92; Myron Eells, *The Indians of Puget Sound: The Notebooks of Myron Eells*, ed. George Castile (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 348, 350.

38. Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Teri Greaves, eds., "Introduction," in *Hearts of Our People*, 12–20; Megan A. Smetzer, *Painful Beauty: Tlingit Women, Beadwork, and the Art of Resilience* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021), 12. I do not intend to exclude those men who are Salish weavers in the twentieth and twenty-first century, such as Ernie James and Rick Fillardeau (Stó:lō), the late Bruce Subiway Miller (Skokomish), the late Bill James (Lummi), and Willard (Buddy) Joseph (Squamish). However, most weavers in the 1960s Stó:lō resurgence were women-identified.

39. Rena Point Bolton and Richard Daly, *Xwelqwiya: The Life of A Stó:lō Matriarch* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013), xxi–xxii.

40. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, Volume One: Summary: Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future (Toronto: James Lorimer & Sons, Ltd., 2015), 2, 40, 43–62, 71–84.

41. Bunn-Marcuse and Smetzer, "Working to Change the Tide," 259–72; Aldona Jonaitis, "Conclusion. Fifty Years Studying Northwest Coast Art: A Personal View," in Bunn-Marcuse and Jonaitis, *Unsettling Native Art Histories*, 299; Aldona Jonaitis, "The Invention and Perpetuation of Culture: The Boasian Legacy and Two 20th Century Woman Totem Pole Carvers," in *Constructing Cultures Then and Now: Celebrating Franz Boas and the Jesup North Pacific Expedition*, ed. Laurel Kendall and Igor Krupnik (Washington, DC: Arctic Studies Center, NMNH, Smithsonian Institution, 2003), 349–60.

42. Bruce Granville Miller, "Anthropology of Art: Shifting Paradigms and Practices, 1870s to 1950," in Townsend-Gault, Kramer and Ke-Ki-in, *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 204–205.

43. Michael Kew, "Traditional Coast Salish Art," in Susan Point: *Coast Salish Artist*, exh. cat. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000), 19–21; Suttles, "The Recognition of Coast Salish Art," 52; Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar*, 16–17, 163–70; Jonaitis, *Art of the Northwest Coast*, 87–88.

heteropatriarchal canonical structure.⁴¹ Not only was a gendered hierarchy applied to Salish weaving, the cultural hierarchy of art forms constructed in the early ethnographic discourse of the Northwest Coast disregarded Salish cultural production. Based on a now disproven theory of unilinear cultural evolution, early settler scholarship disparaged the cultural production of Coast Salish peoples, considering it derivative of northern forms.⁴² Ethnocentric theory and the universalization of art led to assumptions that Coast Salish peoples did not have rich cultural practices. Misunderstandings of Halq'eméylem, Skwxwú7mesh, and hənqəminəṁ-speaking peoples' need for privacy regarding certain belongings and a desire to keep non-initiates and outsiders safe from such powerful entities reinforced these assumptions.⁴³ Yet, this lack of visibility in settler society does not equate to a lack of aesthetic, symbolic or conceptual knowledge.

Unlike their carved counterparts, Salish blankets had been highly visible in ceremony and in daily life. The blankets adorning a delegation of Salish chiefs in 1906 were part of the regalia that denoted a person's rank, social status, and family networks [fig. 3].⁴⁴ Once positioned by academics and social reformers such as Rev. George Raley and Alice Ravenhill as handicrafts, Salish blankets no longer held social or political currency in the minds of outside observers who knew little about Salish society, and were overlooked in the emerging discourse of Northwest Coast Indigenous arts in the 1980s.⁴⁵ Despite their presence as public art installations since 1967 at the Place Bonaventure Hotel in Montreal, since 1975 in the House of Commons in Ottawa, and in the Ottawa International Airport and the Vancouver International Airport in the 1980s and 1990s, Salish weavings were not considered as sites of conceptual, intellectual, or critical labour.⁴⁶ New understandings of the art forms of Halq'eméylem, hənqəminəṁ, and Skwxwú7mesh-speaking peoples are growing through the interventions of weavers, artists and cultural producers from these communities, such as Musqueam artist Susan Point.⁴⁷ However, a gap remains in the art historical scholarship.

Weaving Resurgence

Considering this context, prominent public art installations of Salish weaving present a paradox of (in)visibility. Although they were not included in the art historical discourse of Northwest Coast Indigenous art, Salish weavings have been present in public spaces and settler-colonial institutions since its resurgence in the 1960s. The earliest documented installation sites include six weavings commissioned for the newly constructed Place Bonaventure Hotel in Montreal in 1967 [fig. 4] and two weavings by Mary Peters and Anabel Stewart installed in the renovated Parliament Hill offices of Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1975 [figs. 5–6].⁴⁸ Peters and Stewart were only two of a small and dedicated group of Halq'eméylem-speaking peoples from Stó:lō territories who brought the practice back into the public eye.

Published documentation of weavings' resurgence began in 1966 with Oliver Wells' article, "Return of the Salish Loom" in *The Beaver* magazine. Wells was a retired local farmer and amateur ethnographer who sustained

44. Bierwert, "Weaving in Beauty," 226–29.

45. Tepper, "Coast Salish Weaving," 192; Elizabeth Kalbfleisch, "Celebration or Craftsplotation? Cultural Diplomacy, Marketing, and Coast Salish Knitting," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 29, no. 39–40 (2018–2019): 104–19.

46. Alison Ariss, "Wrapped in Wool: Coast Salish Wool Weaving, Vancouver's Public Art, and Unceded Territory," *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* 7, no. 1 (2019): 53–77. The above publication addresses the four Musqueam weavings at the Vancouver airport. Archival and collections research supported by the Art Canada Institute fellowship has allowed for in-person viewing of the four weavings that made up the two Ottawa installations: two weavings in the House of Commons collection and two weavings in the McCord-Stewart Museum collection in October and November 2022.

47. Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse, "Susan Point: Primacy and Perspective," in *Susan Point: Spindle Whorl*, ed. Grant Arnold and Ian Thom, exh. cat. (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery and Black Dog Publishing, 2017), 63–70.

48. Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 105; The Chilliwack Progress, "Coqualeetza is New Centre for Weavers," June 14, 1972, 2A, <https://theprogress.newspapers.com/image/77074675>. The Chilliwack Museum and Archives and the Canadian Centre for Architecture (Montreal) hold correspondence between the architect Raymond Affleck and Oliver Wells (on behalf of the weavers) in late 1966 and early 1967. There is no record of requests for weavings as public art installations in Vancouver or British Columbia in Wells' fonds at the CM&A. It is expected that the combination of new construction, along with Affleck's conceptualization of Place Bonaventure as a post-modern space, and trends in pairing textiles with architectural spaces, may have stimulated an interest in Salish weaving. See Ray T. Affleck, "Place Bonaventure," unpublished essay manuscript, March 12, 1969 (CCA Ray Affleck fonds, Box 88-05, File 138, R.T.A. Re: P.B./[P.R. Publicity, etc.]; Sandra Alfoldy, *Crafting Identity: The Development of Professional Fine Craft in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 93.

49. Oliver N. Wells, *The Chilliwacks and their Neighbours*, ed. Ralph Maud, Brent Galloway and Marie Weeden (Vancouver: Talonbooks,

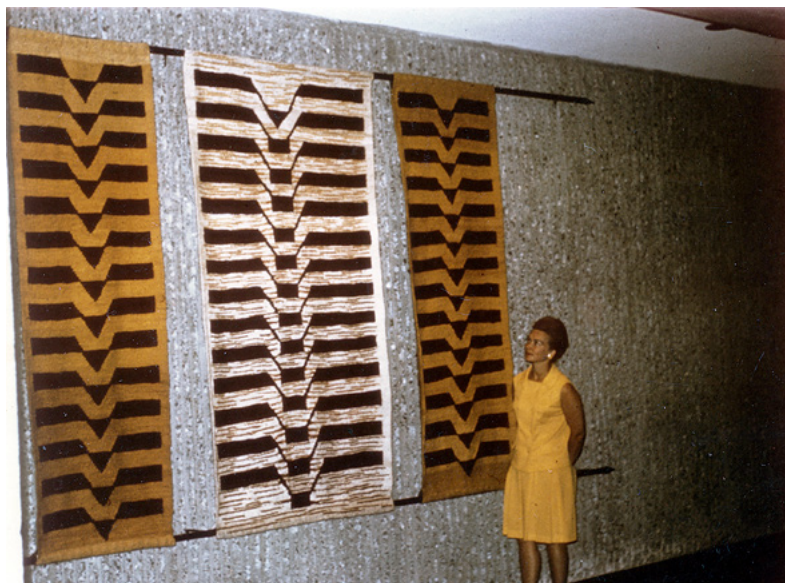


Figure 4. Three of Mary Peters' six weavings installed at Place Bonaventure Hotel, Montréal, ca. 1967. Image courtesy of the Chilliwack Museum and Archives (2004.052.1110).

good relationships with his Indigenous hosts and worked with the Stó:lō weavers as they gathered together people, technology, materials, and knowledge resources to revitalize weaving. Several aspects of weaving's resurgence align with Western concepts of research activity: experimentation, close study, and archival research were central to the weavers' knowledge regeneration. Knowledge was transferred across different forms of weaving, loom prototypes were constructed and tested, and samples of materials, dyes, and woven forms were generated, testing techniques. Oral histories such as those shared by informants in ethnographic interviews may have simultaneously operated as Indigenous modes of recounting knowledge and history.⁴⁹

Ironically, where residential schools and federal bans on cultural practices had severely disrupted knowledge systems, the colonial archives, texts, and photographs that were generated through the salvage paradigm served as alternative sources that provoked memory and re-connected people to stories and family knowledge.⁵⁰ In 1966, Oliver Wells documented how weavers such as Adeline Lorenzetto studied photographs and descriptions of historical weavings in museum collections and parsed ethnographic reports and scholarly articles, such as Kissell's 1929 research paper in *American Anthropologist*. Lorenzetto experimented with techniques on hand-held looms, such as the sample Adeline shared with Sara Wells [fig. 7].⁵¹

Salish peoples have continuously integrated new knowledge while creating new outputs, supporting cultural continuity. The energies put into transforming and sustaining Salish knowledge are visible in the history of new technologies and creative outputs relevant to Salish weaving knowledge. For



Figure 5. Mary Peters, untitled rug, ca. 1975. Sheep's wool, 205.7 × 139 cm, Catalogue No. O-3020. Photo: House of Commons Collection, Ottawa.



Figure 6. Anabel Stewart, untitled rug, ca. 1975. Sheep's wool, 213.4 × 137.8 cm, Catalogue No. O-3022, Photo: House of Commons Collection, Ottawa.



Figure 7. Adeline Lorenzetto (standing) sharing her weaving experimentation with Sara Wells. Original black-and-white photograph stamped "Feb 64." Photo: Courtesy of the Chilliwack Museum and Archives.

1987), 94–95. Mary Peters recounts her mountain goat story for Wells.

50. Megan Smetzer, *Painful Beauty*, 13–15.

51. Oliver N. Wells, “Return of the Salish Loom,” in *Salish Weaving: Primitive and Modern* (Sardis, BC: Oliver N. Wells, 1969), 27, 33. Sara Wells was Oliver’s wife.

52. Eells, *The Indians of Puget Sound*, 170.

53. Marianne P. Stopp, “The Coast Salish Knitters and the Cowichan Sweater: An Event of National Historic Significance,” *Material Culture Review* 76 (Fall 2012): 9–29; *The Story of the Coast Salish Knitters*, directed by Christine Welsh (2000, Montreal: Prairie Girl Films (Firm) and National Film Board of Canada), DVD.

54. Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 22–23 (fig. 8); Chilliwack Museum and Archives, “Object Record,” Blanket (Sto:lo), Object no. 1963.005.001, <https://chilliwack.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/D97272A2-C154-4867-A77B-968829875717>. Described as the chief O’Hamil blanket in the CM&A catalogue, it is dated to 1830 and was given to the weavers to study by Mrs. August Jim (née Margaret Silva).

55. Tepper, George, and Joseph, *Salish Blankets*, 11–12; Schulting, “The Hair of the Dog,” 57. Schulting used stable carbon isotope analysis in his study of Salish woolly dogs. Recent studies include X-Ray fluorescence using a portable xRF machine that recorded the heavy metals present in some of the nineteenth-century blankets on display in *The Fabric of Our Land* exhibition at the UBC Museum of Anthropology, in November 2017 and April 2018 (Sue Rowley, email communication, May 2023). Likewise, genetic analysis of Salish woolly dog hair has been conducted at the Smithsonian Institute (Liz Hammond-Kaarremaa, personal and email communication, May and September 2023).

56. On April 7, 2023, I had the opportunity to clean and card mountain goat wool with Musqueam weaver Debra Sparrow, and Sue Rowley and Liz Hammond-Kaarremaa. Debra continues to work with the knowledge of weaving shared with her by her late grandfather, Ed Sparrow.

57. Tepper, George, and Joseph, *Salish Blankets*, 3–4; Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar*, 7; Debra Sparrow, “A Journey,” in *Material Matters: The Art and Culture of Contemporary Textiles*, ed. Ingrid Bachmann and Ruth Scheuing (Toronto: vyz Books,

instance, when spinning wheels were introduced to Salish peoples in the 1850s in what is now called Washington State, Twana and Klallam-speaking men re-engineered the European spinning wheel to accommodate existing Salish spindle whorl technology, creating a new form of spinning wheel.⁵² In the early 1900s, Salish women integrated their fibre and garment design knowledge with introduced knitting technologies, creating the iconic Cowichan sweater.⁵³ And in the 1960s, the Stó:lō women who came together to weave from reserves near Sardis and Chilliwack, BC learned through the close study of nineteenth-century Salish weavings that local Indigenous families had kept in their possession. For instance, Adeline Lorenzetto and her colleagues cut sections from an 1830 mountain-goat wool blanket, carefully deconstructing them to reveal an ancestral weaver’s techniques.⁵⁴ These labour-intensive material transformations point to the strong desires and creative capacities of Salish communities to sustain their cultural practices.

Expert Salish weavers continue to incorporate academic research findings into their knowledge bases, including microscopic, isotopic, and X-Ray fluorescence analyses of materials used in historical blankets.⁵⁵ They also share their direct experiences of weaving, spinning and fibre preparation, their oral narratives, texts, images, dye recipes, and their plant and animal fibre knowledge with each other and with academics.⁵⁶ Publications in 1998, 1999, 2008 and 2017 show that weavers maintain respect for the blankets as beings that connect them with ancestors in their processes of learning and discovery.⁵⁷ In these ways, Stó:lō women such as Martha James, Josephine Kelly, Adeline Lorenzetto, Mary Peters, and Anabel Stewart actively employed what Wilson terms “strategies of inquiry” to re-generate a weaving practice that was always already and simultaneously research and creation.⁵⁸

Resurgence and Research-Creation: Design, Respect, and Innovation

Mary Peters began weaving from memory in her sixties, prior to meeting Oliver Wells in 1964. Peters was held in high respect in her community for her customary knowledge: she did not attend residential school and Halq’eméylem was her first language. Peters’ basket-making practice was based on knowledge shared through her mother’s family. Without access to customary materials, Peters initially built her own loom and employed a range of materials such as cotton rags and old garments cut into strips for her weavings, working with designs that were “clearly imposed” in her mind.⁵⁹

Peters’ ability to transform customary designs can be viewed as part of a longer history of Salish weavers’ inquiry into many forms of weaving, designs, patterns, styles, and the range of potential meanings embedded in the abstract and geometric motifs they employed. Paula Gustafson, Leslie Tepper, Katharine Dickerson, and Sharon Fortney are among the scholars who have analyzed historical blankets and baskets to show how there has been an ongoing interchange of designs across woven Salish forms and materials by weavers prior to individuals such as Peters.⁶⁰

Respect for another weaver’s design is evident in what have been called “replica” blankets made by Mary Peters, Anabel Stewart, and other twenty



Figure 8. Mary Peters' "revival version" of the Perth Blanket (see fig. 1). Photo: Courtesy of the Chilliwack Museum and Archives.

1998), 149–56; Miller and Pavel, "Traditional Teachings," 24–49.

58. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 40; Wells, "Return of the Salish Loom," 27, 29–30. Although the Guild grew to over forty members in the 1970s, the resurgence began with individual Stó:lō women such as Amy Cooper, Martha and Irene James, Josephine Kelly, Adeline Lorenzetto, Mary Peters, and Anabel Stewart.

59. Wells, "Return of the Salish Loom," 27; Vancouver Art Gallery, "On Collecting: The Salish Weavers Guild," YouTube, Nov. 19, 2020, <https://youtu.be/6196tXftNhs>.

60. Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*; Dickerson, "Classic Salish Twined Robes"; Fortney, "Identifying Stó:lō Basketry"; Tepper, George, and Joseph, *Salish Blankets*, xvii, 34–35, 40, 80–82, 107–113, and 116. Tepper, George, and Joseph discuss the capacity for innovation, such as the creation of the illusion of layers in a nineteenth-century blanket design.

61. Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 111, fig. 93; Lorraine Ling, "Salish Weaving, Then & Now," *Interweave* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1979), 40.

62. Port Coquitlam Herald, "Weaving Into the Past," July 24, 1979 (Chilliwack Museum and Archives, File 2004.052.0993).

63. MOA, *Musqueam Weavers*, 58–59, 67; Bierwert, "Weaving in Beauty," 241–43. Dr. Susan Pavel apprenticed with expert weaver G. Bruce Subiyay Miller in the 1990s

and twenty-first century Salish weavers. Created in the early 1970s, Peters and Stewart's individual "revival versions" of the pre-1832 Salish blanket from the Perth Museum collection in Scotland [fig. 2] emulate the original design in their own style [see figs. 6 and 8].⁶¹ A similar approach is present in the design choices of later Stó:lō weavers. In 1979, Oliver Wells' daughter Betty Purkiss stated,

Besides the fine work these women do I am always impressed with the great feeling of sisterhood that exists between them—a strong bond and a respect of one artist for another. For instance, there are some who have a strong feel for a particular design, and it goes without saying that no one else would infringe upon it.⁶²

Expert Salish weavers such as Debra Sparrow, Robyn Sparrow, Barbara Marks-McCoy, and Krista Point, and expert weaver Dr. Susan Pavel, have also respectfully referenced designs from historic blankets and garments in their new creations.⁶³ The deconstruction of a weaving is a means of learning techniques, while the emulation of designs is a research experience and a simultaneous process of creation. The creative dynamism of design available to this practice appears to be grounded in Salish systems of knowledge based on respect for proprietary lineages of knowledge, resonating with Wilson's Indigenous research paradigm.⁶⁴

Tracing lineages of design also reveals the networks of families who took up weaving in the 1960s resurgence in Chilliwack, BC. Local newspaper articles from the 1960s and 1970s individually name the weavers involved in events and often mention their familial relationships. Newspaper photographs showed nieces, daughters, granddaughters, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, mothers and mothers-in-law working together to reconstruct weaving practices. In the 1960s and 70s, Stó:lō weavers chose to keep

and is connected to the Skokomish community by marriage to Michael CHiXapkaid Pavel, Miller's nephew. Dr. Pavel is dedicated to teaching, learning and sharing the knowledge with Salish communities.

64. Point Bolton and Daly, *Xwelqwiya*, 89–91.

65. Wells, "Return of the Salish Loom," 34–35; John Davies, "Salish weaving, Once a 'Dying Art', Gets a New Lease on Life," *Valley Magazine*, March 29, 1972, 7 (Chilliwack Museum & Archives, File 2004.052.0993); Jacobs, "Squamish Praxis," 51; Tepper, "Coast Salish weaving," 193.

66. Vancouver Art Gallery, "On Collecting: The Salish Weavers Guild," YouTube, Nov. 19, 2020, <https://youtu.be/6196txftNhs>; Gustafson, *Salish Weaving*, 112–13.

67. Collections with weavings by Mary Peters, Monica Williams, and Elizabeth Phillips include: Canadian Museum of History, <https://www.historymuseum.ca/collections/?type=all&q1=all%3A%3Acontains%3A%3AMonica%20-phillips&sort=title&order=asc&view=grid&size=24&page=1>; Royal British Columbia Museum, <https://search-collections.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/Ethnology/KeywordResults?as.keyword=Elizabeth+phillips&search=Search>; and UBC Museum of Anthropology, <http://collection-online.moa.ubc.ca/search?keywords=mary+peters>. Peters' granddaughter Monica Williams also carried forward and modified her grandmothers' designs in her own work.

68. Miller and Pavel, "Traditional Teachings," 27.

69. Miller and Pavel, 32, 40. See also Bierwert, "Weaving in Beauty," 245.

70. Sarah Nason, "It's in my Blood: Business and Community Building in the Coast Salish Weaver's Guild 1970–1985," *Ethnohistory Field School Report*, Department of History, University of Victoria, 2015, 16.

71. Jacobs, "Squamish Praxis," 16.

72. Tepper, George, and Joseph, *Salish Blankets*, 134–41; Bierwert, "Weaving in Beauty," 235; Gustafson, *Salish Weavings*, 35–36.

73. Miller and Pavel, "Traditional Teachings," 40–41.

74. Tepper, George, and Joseph, *Salish Blankets*, 1–4; MOA, *Musqueam Weavers*, 35; Sparrow, "A Journey," 149–56.

the practice within Indigenous communities, concentrating on restoring inter-generational learning within and across families, consistent with what the late Deborah Jacobs described as "family-centred teaching."⁶⁵ Siyame-qwot Vivian Williams recalls her grandmother—the weaver Mary Peters—telling her the stories that went into her weavings and the meanings held in her designs.⁶⁶ Peters' daughter Siyamiateliyot Elizabeth Phillips and her granddaughter Monica Williams (nee Phillips) also have weavings in museum collections across Canada, transposing a family focused pedagogy into a family history of weaving documented in colonial institutions.⁶⁷

In addressing Salish weaving's resurgence as an Indigenous form of research-creation grounded in Salish paradigms, what was valued by the weavers becomes visible, such as the maintenance and respect of customary and family-specific knowledge. The teachings of the late expert weaver Bruce Subiyay Miller (Skokomish) ring true with Jacobs' analysis of Salish pedagogy. Subiyay Miller speaks of Salish artists as "the first historians."⁶⁸ Subiyay Miller's holistic approach to cultural production emphasizes the responsibilities of Salish artists to transmit history and knowledge through their artworks, encourages close looking at the world, and sustains connections between artworks and stories.⁶⁹ Like Peters' integration of stories about her loved ones into her weavings, her act of creating a work of art is not separate from her life history, nor is it purely an aesthetic process or output. Subiyay Miller, Jacobs, and Peters all indicate that the value of customary knowledge is not solely content: *how* it is passed on between generations as a particular process carries this distinct pedagogy forward. For instance, expert weaver Frieda George recalled watching her grandmother weave as a young child, in the early years of the revival. At the age of thirteen, after a decade of close observation, Frieda was deemed ready to take up the work of weaving.⁷⁰ This approach is similar to the emphasis Jacobs places on the value of "upbringing" as holistic, as a mode of teaching skills and developing a "moral universe" for being in the world, and as the ground for knowledge.⁷¹

The words of twentieth and twenty-first century Salish weavers clarify the values in Salish knowledge systems, such as inspiration, imagination, and spirit. Inspiration may come from archives and old blankets, but it also comes through dreams and visions, and through contact with ancestors and materials during the process of weaving.⁷² Imagination is described as a source of knowledge by Michael CHiXapkaid Pavel and Gerald Bruce Subiyay Miller:

Knowledge acquired through one's imagination should be given credence... Imagination, in its basic form, means creating images that are beyond the five senses. ... Imagination, if utilized creatively, can be a valuable tool...for exploring the realities of our worlds intuitively....In this regard, oral histories recorded in art are indeed valuable because they contain another form of reality relevant to modern society and human experience.⁷³

The importance of spirit within weaving knowledge is also discussed by accomplished weavers such as hereditary chief Janice George, Wendy Grant John, and Debra Sparrow.⁷⁴ In "A Journey," Sparrow narrates her experiences

with weaving as a search for knowledge of Musqueam identity and history.⁷⁵ Sparrow felt that a sense of “spirit” was absent from academic research and emphasized spirit’s importance for creating knowledge, similar to Wilson’s description of its absence in university contexts.⁷⁶ Through that (re)search Salish weavers have focused on their communities and rebuilt pride in Salish ways of being, locating “spirit” and re-engaging it with technical and material processes.⁷⁷ Their weavings constitute those “different *tangible forms of research*” emanating from a resurgent praxis of intergenerational knowledge transfer.⁷⁸ That knowledge transfer is not rote memorization or dogmatic, rather, it is dynamic and interpersonal, a living and experiential body of knowledge made visible by the weavings in their changing forms and shifting sites of visibility.

The observations of Sparrow and Wilson mark substantive differences in approaches to knowledge generation and dissemination between Western universities and Indigenous (Salish) pedagogies.⁷⁹ The university has historically privileged one approach, limiting the acceptance of Indigenous forms of knowledge.⁸⁰ Likewise, framing artistic practices as research without altering underlying disciplinary, pedagogical, or knowledge-dissemination structures may result in mere “gesture[s] of inclusion.”⁸¹ These issues are echoed in my anxiety over subsuming Salish weaving in the realm of research as defined in the dominant discourse, thereby reifying settler-colonial logics.⁸² The fraught reality of avoiding structural privileges leads me to question if my analysis will undermine the centering of Indigenous knowledge or if it will support the expansion of respect for multiple knowledge systems.

A space of possibility opens through Loveless’s statement that “...when the dialogic and pedagogical start to be used as artistic *material*, the university becomes both a site of institutional critique and an exploratory playground.”⁸³ In thinking of Salish weavings as holders of knowledge and as entities imbued with the intentions of the weaver, the dialogic (relational) and pedagogical (processual) capacity of each weaving becomes evident. For instance, the stories embedded in Peters’ weavings make her history visible. Transmission of Peters’ knowledge occurs through the memories evoked by the weavings for her granddaughter Vivian Williams, and through the practice and skills she passed on to her family and her community.⁸⁴ Thought, intention, and care take material form in the weavings, while the ideal and resistant mode of research-creation—one that creates space for multiple ontologies—becomes relevant to the analysis of the roles of Salish weavings in their installation sites. While public installations of Salish weavings may be deemed as sites of knowledge exchange in this reading, it is not their status as artworks (as designated in the discipline of art history) that grants them this possibility: Salish blankets have always been visible as markers of status and the rights and “obligations of the wearer.”⁸⁵ What appears “new” to critical art historical scholarship is always-already part of Salish knowledge.

75. Sparrow, “A Journey,” 149, 152.

76. Jill Baird, “Weaving Worlds: Colliding Traditions Collaborating with Musqueam Weaver and Educator Debra Sparrow” (master’s thesis, University of British Columbia, 1997), 35; Sparrow, “A Journey,” 149, 152; Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 89–91.

77. The Chilliwack Progress, “Weaving a World Reputation,” March 26, 1975, 50, <https://the-progress.newspapers.com/image/77089295>; MOA, *Musqueam Weavers*, 72.

78. Loveless, 24.

79. Loveless, 24.

80. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 30, 45–53, 58.

81. Loveless, 6.

82. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; and Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, Writing Past Colonialism Series (London: Cassell, 1999).

83. Loveless, 9–10 (emphasis in original).

84. Vancouver Art Gallery, “On Collecting.” The weaving Williams speaks about is not in her possession: her ability to visit with it is predicated on institutional policies and practices of collections access.

85. Tepper, George, and Joseph, *Salish Blankets*, 2.

My encounters with *NexwNiwChet/The Teachings* began in 2016. My strategy of inquiry integrates the late Deborah Jacob's theorization of Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) pedagogy with my site-specific experience and critical Indigenous feminist analysis of the installation to form a productive entanglement of knowledges.

NexwNiwChet/The Teachings consists of sixteen hand-woven wool blankets located in the "Aboriginal Gathering Place" (Saywell Atrium) at Simon Fraser University [figs. 9 and 10].⁸⁶ The collective known as Skwxwú7mesh L'hen Awtxw was formed by hereditary chief Chepximiya Siyam' (Janice George) and Willard [Buddy] Joseph in 2007. The Squamish resurgence of weaving began in the early 2000s, and George and Joseph drew upon the knowledge of their grandmothers, their community, their teachers, and studied archival resources and museum collections.⁸⁷

NexwNiwChet/The Teachings are visible to passersby from the main walkway through the Saywell Hall Building, where they appear as if at eye-level. Divided into two groups, twelve of the panels hang in a horizontally oriented rectangular installation of three squared groups of four weavings set between the pillars of the atrium wall, at the apex of the atrium's outer wall and its glass-edged roof. Four more weavings are installed as a squared group centered above the entrance to the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, the entity responsible for this work as part of its collection within the university institution.⁸⁸ The weavings are roughly square in format and of similar dimensions and hang on brushed metal rods inserted through their upper warp thread ends (fringe). They stand out from the wall's surface by approximately ten centimeters, and the bottom fringe hangs freely. If a passerby takes the stairs down into the atrium, they will find didactic labels that contain the title, material, and date of each weaving.

Twelve weavings are labelled in blocks of four, from top left to bottom right:

Medicine, River	Seasons, Cedar	Temlh, Medicine
Medicine, Berry Season	Landscapes, Directions	The People, Medicine

The central six panels are abstractly patterned and multicoloured, and are bordered by four burgundy weavings, paired vertically at each end [see fig. 9]. The four weavings above the entrance to the archaeology museum are named, from top left to bottom right [see fig. 10],

The Chief,	Four Seasons
Tsatsky,	First Salmon

As a group, the weavings contain a series of multicoloured abstract designs that employ triangle, wave, diamond, diagonal, and zigzag motifs. They are variously made with sections of twinned work (two horizontal weft threads twisted around each vertical warp thread to produce a firm or closed weave) resulting in solid blocks of colour, and in sections of twill work (single weft threads are passed under and over the warps, producing an open

86. The Bill Reid Centre, "Nexw Niw Chet (The Teachings)," Simon Fraser University, <https://www.sfu.ca/brc/imeshMobileApp/imesh-art-walk/-nexwniwchet-the-teachings.html>.

87. Annie Ross, "L'Hen Awtxw: A Squamish Weaving House," *American Indian Art* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2010), 55.

88. Rob Rondeau, Simon Fraser University, Museum of Archaeology & Ethnography, Acting Director, email to author, July 29, 2022.



Figure 9. Skwxwú7mesh L'hen Awtxw (Weaving House), *NexwNiwChet/The Teachings*, 2009. Hand woven wool. Twelve of sixteen weavings installed at Saywell Atrium, Simon Fraser University Burnaby Campus, Burnaby, BC. Collection of the SFU Museum of Archaeology & Ethnography. Photo by author, July 2022.



Figure 10. Skwxwú7mesh L'hen Awtxw (Weaving House), *NexwNiwChet/The Teachings*, 2009. Hand woven wool. Four of sixteen weavings installed at the Saywell Atrium, Simon Fraser University Burnaby Campus, Burnaby, BC. Collection of the SFU Museum of Archaeology & Ethnography. Photo by author, July 2022.

weave) forming diagonal chevron and diamond designs in the body of the weave. The white warps and dimensional symmetry of each panel lends to an overall harmonious visual quality. All the designs are large-scaled elements found in historical blankets and baskets, making each one legible from a distance.

In connection with their names on the didactic labels, the geometric designs take on symbolic meanings: triangles are The People, Salmon, Landscapes and Directions; the blue waves are a river, and pink diamonds are berries. But the meanings of the two weavings labeled with the Squamish words Temlh and Tsatsky are unknown to me, as a non-Skw̓wú7mesh Sníchim (language) speaking person. I am aware that four is sacred in Salish cosmology, and it repeats in the design elements of the blankets, in the four “Medicine” blankets, and in the configurations of the blankets and didactic labels.⁸⁹ Salmon and First Salmon are present in two weavings, and the latter points to an annual ceremony on the Northwest Coast that honours salmon, the other-than-human kin with whom Salish peoples have long and reciprocal relationships of care.⁹⁰

The weavings provide a sense of the knowledge that Squamish peoples hold about this place; knowledge held for eons before the construction of the university campus in 1965.⁹¹ But only a sense of that knowledge for settlers, arrivants, or other non-Squamish educated viewers. Based on Tepper, George, and Joseph’s 2017 analysis of historical Salish blankets, I could choose to interpret this arrangement with its dynamic diagonals and shifting colours as an illusion of blankets within a blanket, bounded by the four burgundy works.⁹² But speculation does not bring me any closer to knowing the teachings they embody. Without access to the privilege and the responsibility of Squamish knowledge, I remain ignorant of the mountain’s teachings and its enduring relationship with Squamish peoples. As I stand below the weavings on this university campus, recognition of my ignorance floods my awareness and reveals a critical affect of the artwork. I stand beneath the weavings to read their names, but I have not learned what knowledge they hold. The installation physically re-situates my being to “denaturalize” the hierarchical relationship between Indigenous and settler-colonial knowledge.⁹³ I become acutely aware of what counts as knowledge and who has access to it through this encounter.

According to scholar Annie Ross, *NexwNiwChet/The Teachings* provide a Squamish narrative of Lhukw’lhukw’áyten (Burnaby Mountain) as the “original teacher.”⁹⁴ Installed during the “Honouring Homeland Weaving Conference” in 2009, the weavings took part in a “Symbolic ... eroding [of] the exclusivity of the University setting by honouring different types of knowledge in an environment customarily oriented toward Western knowledge and value systems.”⁹⁵ Ross’s analysis sheds light on the critique embedded in the installation, and how it values Squamish knowledge by both upholding it and protecting it within this space. Ross does not reveal the embedded stories. The weavings may be an abstraction of Lhukw’lhukw’áyten stories for which Squamish people are responsible or, as Shawn Wilson might

89. Tepper, George, and Joseph, *Salish Blankets*, 109.

90. Carlson, *You are Asked to Witness*, 3–5.

91. Hugh Johnston, *Radical Campus* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 114. Janice George in conversation with the author, April 17, 2023.

92. Tepper, George, and Joseph, *Salish Blankets*, 80–82.

93. Loveless, 20.

94. Annie Ross, “Honouring Homeland and Her Beings: Weaving Conference 2009,” Simon Fraser University, March 27–29, 2009, https://www.sfu.ca/lovemotherearth/weaving_conference2009.html.

95. Ross, “Honouring Homeland and Her Beings.”

96. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 77.

say, stories of the mountain with whom they are accountable.⁹⁶ Perhaps the designs point to what those teachings contain without revealing anything to the uninitiated. In this moment of heightened awareness, the teachings from the work of resurgence emerge: I have learned the status of my relationship with Lhukw'lhukw'áytén and with Squamish knowledge, and I have learned how it may be changed.

I return to the late Deborah Jacobs' writing to consider the installation's possible grounding and intentions. The role of teacher in the "upbringing" of the Squamish person is embedded in daily life, in ways of being, and in the land.⁹⁷ The mountain plays a clear role in Squamish pedagogy as the "original teacher" and maintains its agency within this artwork. It is the relationship to the knowledge held in the weavings, and how that relationship is developed, that is critical to thinking through what the weavings do in this space. From what I have come to understand, the weavings, the mountain and its teachings, the things that they each hold space for, do not deny the viewer knowledge: they await the proper relationships to be in place prior to sharing certain knowledge. They shift the focus from the weavings as objects to my relationship with them in this place and its historical contexts.⁹⁸ By maintaining a focus on the way in which research-creation is "done," it is possible to see how the weavers' praxis and woven outputs resonate with research-creation. Respecting that there is difference in Indigenous knowledge processes becomes essential to comprehending a difference in their outputs.

Summary

If the viewer will consider Salish weaving as knowledge, as the output of embodied intellectual activity, *NexwNiwChet/The Teachings* are (re)cognize-able as active entities: they uphold and protect Squamish knowledge in this institution's space.⁹⁹ The viewer is re-positioned toward a new relationship with Squamish knowledge. The weavers have created "a site of generative recrafting...that might help render daily life in the academy more pedagogically, politically and affectively sustainable."¹⁰⁰ I will omit the academy as a qualifier to shift focus onto daily life in unceded Salish territory, where Salish weaving is once again present and visible. As an artwork that participates in an ongoing resurgent process of Salish praxis, *NexwNiwChet/The Teachings* does not acquiesce to dominant forms of knowledge. Its presence outside and above the entrance to the archaeology and ethnography museum and opposite to the Indigenous Studies entrance transforms the atrium into a space for the "remaking" of relationships between Indigenous and Western forms of knowledge and institutions.¹⁰¹

In focusing on the resonance of research-creation's change-orientation to that within Jacob's Skwúwú7mesh praxis, Salish weaving becomes visible as its own form of knowledge at work in the world. Research-creation activity—as it exists in Salish weaving praxis—can hold a recuperative capacity continuously at work against the impositions of colonial knowledge systems. Over centuries, Salish weavers have continually renewed the creative

97. Jacobs, "Squamish Praxis," 13–14.

98. Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 35–42, 73.

99. Janice George in conversation with the author, April 17, 2023.

100. Loveless, 3.

101. Loveless, 16.

outputs of Salish weaving. As public art installations Salish weavings are shared as visible sites of knowledge, as sites of teaching and learning and as spaces of innovation, on their own terms. ¶

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