

Re: 2024 Eldon + Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize Nomination

Tiffany Shaw's knitted installation *my children, my mother, her mother and their mother, and their mother, and their mother, and their mother..... nitawasimisak, nikawiy, okawiya ekwa okawiwawa, okawiyiwa, ekwa okawiyiwa ekwa okawiyiwa.....* was a compelling landmark in Edmonton for the short time that it was displayed at The Works Art & Design Festival 2023.

The two-part place-making sculpture consisted of hand knit mylar made to fit and attached to two separate armature pieces. The first is a familiar Works entry way – A giant gateway structure that can be walked around or through, and that was clad on all sides with the mylar treatment. The second structure was set forward and to the side of the gateway. It consisted of a supportive wooden wave form with five peaks. The three centre crests rose about 5' and the two sides came up to about 40" including the thick pad of mylar. For the wave form, a long continuous knit runner was attached over the top, and excess material sloped over the edge across either side lengthwise. The vertical portions of the underlying structure were clad in flat mylar for a continuous reflective effect. Each dip in the wave became a cradle. Here, the public was invited to sit or lie down within the mylar and use it as a space for rest. The material grew from human size production to more than human scale on the gateway, then ebbed again to become a space for human bodies to exist, reflecting the undulating continuity of the work.

In the artist's words:

*This work is a knitted series about my family which I am calling grief work. I started making this work shortly after my mother passed in 2020 as a way to physically work through my grief. Titled "my children, my mother, her mother and their mother, and their mother, and their mother, and their mother..... nitawasimisak, nikawiy, okawiya ekwa okawiwawa, okawiyiwa, ekwa okawiyiwa ekwa okawiyiwa.....", this work is about the generations in my family, from those who came before me, to those who will be after, and the trauma, love, and connection that passes with each generation. This work encourages you to sit upon it to rest and relax. Though it might be noisy and a bit awkward to find a resting spot upon it, my hope is that it will ultimately support and comfort you as well as provide shade.*

The use of knitting ties to family, tradition, and connection. Textiles and related techniques innately evoke process, softness, security, and connection. The craft of knitting is one of the oldest forms of technology and the visibility of the technique is a way of connecting threads into cloth, as well as a method of rest and healing. Rather than wool and knitting needles, Tiffany Shaw uses large rolls of reflective mylar bunched together to become crinkling yarn that requires the entire body to knit. Arms become needles and the shoulders and torso are engaged in the acutely physical processes of looping, pulling, and slipping the material through itself until it transforms into a new fabric on an industrial scale.

The labour of creating this piece was also a point of connection and knowledge sharing. Shaw presented the concept and the process, as well as past knit and mylar works to a group of artist assistants, then guided them to understand the material, technique, and what the embodied exertion

has come to represent for the artist. In all, over 8000 feet of mylar was knit, and sometimes re-knit, by a group of 15 assistants to complete the piece. The themes of continuity and community were strengthened by this integrated communal making where multiple bodies were invited into the process of embodied knitting and grief work.

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Among many excellent presentations that involved scale, collaboration, and public engagement, Shaw's installation stood out as a meaningful, beautiful, and unique moment of embodiment. This artwork inhabited every value that our festival aims to present. It discusses difficult topics such as grief and trauma while being able to create a space of rest, healing, joy and play for every visitor to take part in, including the members of the team who participated in the process of knitting. With its physical presence and rich community engagement, the work effortlessly created an opportunity for members of the Edmonton public to experience and enjoy art.