

January 17, 2025

Re: 2025 Eldon + Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize

Dear Selection Committee,

It is with great pleasure that the Art Gallery of St. Albert nominates *Adorned in our Threads* by Raneece Buddan for the 2025 Eldon + Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize. *Adorned in our Threads* was exhibited at our Gallery from March 14 to April 25, 2024, as part of Buddan's stunning solo exhibition *Threading Through Time*.

Raneece Buddan is a Jamaican visual artist who resides in Treaty 6 territory, amiwaciwâskahikan/ Edmonton. Weaving together curiosity and sincerity, Buddan explores her identity as a Jamaican woman of both African and Indian descent. *Threading Through Time* represents a journey of her own self-discovery – connecting with the visual cultures and artistic practices of her ancestry as a way to connect with and understand herself.

Jamaica is a melting pot of peoples from Africa, India and the world over, brought there over hundreds of years through the Atlantic slave trade, indentured servitude, forced and voluntary migration. The stories, practices and traditions from a multitude of ancestral lands have blended and morphed over time, some parts forgotten, some parts adopted. A refrain throughout Jamaica is “Out of many, one people” reinforcing that this is a nation and culture made from pieces of many others.

“Though I feel pride in being Jamaican there is a yearning to learn more about the original cultures that formed this new one; where they came from and how they expressed themselves creatively. This sense of loss has powered my visual art to create something tangible that I can view outside of myself.” (Buddan, 2024)

With an ever-growing medley of media, *Threading Through Time* incorporated textile design, weaving, pottery, painting, carving, hairstyles and folklore, all of which hold stories of ancestral peoples and cultures that Buddan longs to know. Her practice begins with research, getting to know the material and artistic practices of her ancestral communities. She wants to understand the history and development of local textiles, the uses of traditional ceramic forms, and what roles these objects play in community and culture. After building up a wealth of knowledge, Buddan then dives into learning each technique for herself, working from images, videos and books.

For Buddan, this process of learning with her hands is not about mastering a particular technique, or recreating cultural objects, but rather a process of building connections and feeling grounded in her identity. In essence, each of her works, regardless of material, scale, technique or approach is a self-portrait. They manifest the many people, cultures and practices that intersect within her person, exploring and celebrating the ever-expanding complexity of Buddan's identity.

Adorned in our Threads stands just a bit taller than Buddan. Graceful and poised, its presence within the gallery was undeniable, drawing viewer to it. Standing before the piece feels like engaging in conversation with the artist, learning alongside her. Fabrics and motifs used throughout *Threading Through Time* can be found in this work. Similarly to how Buddan sees herself as a meeting point for the many people and cultures that form her ancestry, *Adorned in our Threads* served as a visual nexus in the exhibition.

The most recent of her largescale wooden sculptures, *Adorned in our Threads* was carved from a single piece of Dutch Elm wood. Buddan gently adjusted the contours of the wood's natural shape to reveal a figural form. Following the grain of the wood, Ankara and Akwete textiles from Nigeria move from the shoulder and around the base of the head. Kalamkari block printed and hand painted fabrics from India are inlaid throughout the body and torso. Contrasting with the pale colour of the wood, the richly coloured fabrics drawing the eye like jewels. Carved in low relief across the surface are patterns and motifs from both fabrics.

Fabrics from both Africa and India are found throughout Jamaica, forming a familiar part of Buddan's visual experience growing up. But for Buddan, they were ungrounded, separated from their original cultural meaning and histories, similarly to how the peoples and communities who moved to Jamaica lost parts of their cultures over time. These colonial histories are an inseparable part of Buddan's ancestry and are embodied in *Adorned in our Threads*. Ankara / Dutch Wax textiles are inlaid into a Dutch Elm tree. When colonizing and oppressing the continent, Dutch merchants pushed out traditional textile practices throughout West Africa, replacing them with this mass-produced fabric.

Running parallel to Buddan's research on textiles and cultural aesthetics are her questions of personal aesthetics and how different cultures value individual beauty. Beauty standards, like textiles, have been deeply affected by colonial histories, and continue to resonate in our present day. Areas of brown and beige paint pool and flow across the surface of the pale wood, evoking questions on the historic racist valuing of peoples based on their skin colour, and its contemporary echoes in today's beauty standards.

Crowning *Adorned in our Threads* are resin casts of Bantu hair knots, a traditional hairstyle historically found throughout Nigeria and West Africa. Catching the sunlight, the resin casts glow from within, showcasing their delicate twists and lines. "*Hair is a constant theme in my work symbolizing its cultural significance and role in beauty standards. How my hair is presented dictates how I am accepted into spaces.*" (Buddan, 2024) Knots, synthetic braids and locks are incorporated into many works throughout *Threading Through Time*. Buddan celebrates the contemporary resurgence of traditional Nigerian hair styles, recognising their cultural significance and value.


"This piece serves as an archive of ancestral knowledge and all which runs through my veins."
(Buddan, 2024)

Buddan's dedication to her artistic practice has resulted in a body of work that is complex, nuanced and ever expanding. Buddan started this journey into self-identity while completing her Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Alberta, graduating in 2020. Even before graduation, her work was recognized and exhibited widely throughout the Edmonton region and across Alberta. She was included in *Five Artists, One Love* in 2019 and 2020. Including her exhibition with the Art Gallery of St. Albert, she had five solo exhibitions in the last two years, while also participating in several group exhibitions, and artist residencies.

Led by her curiosity and a deep sincerity, Buddan creates work unlike anything that I have seen. Each piece in *Threading Through Time* was unique and beautifully presented, an impressive feat of interdisciplinary excellence. Each work elevates the others, enhancing understanding, conversation and connection. *Adorned in our Threads* sits central, inviting every viewer into Buddan's very personal journey. While specific to Buddan's own experience and identity, her work became a site for others to see their own experiences. Through her work, we feel through our own longings for connection. The deep, universal desire to know ourselves and the people who came before us.

Brilliantly engaging, I know that Buddan is only partway through a monumental journey. Without reservation, I am delighted to nominate *Adorned in our Threads* by Raneece Buddan for the 2025 Eldon + Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize.

Sincerely,



Emily Baker

Curator
Art Gallery of St. Albert