

NATIVE WOMEN IN THE ARTS

a centre for Native women artists

401 Richmond Street West
Suite 363
Toronto, Ontario
M5V 1X3

Native Women in the Arts works to build networks that help to break down isolation, forge connections, gain access to resources and support cultural self-determination. Native Women in the Arts encourages and makes visible the work and activities of Native women from all artistic disciplines across Turtle Island.

Projects to date include:

(1) A Gathering of Seven Circles

In March 1993, Native Women in the Arts hosted an evening for a Gathering of seven artistic circles in the Native community. From each artistic circle, a designated speaker expressed the needs, barriers and resources of the following disciplines: theatre, modern & traditional dance, crafts, visual arts, film/video, music, and writing/storytelling to the community. Over 100 people attended this very successful Gathering at The Toronto Arts Council, with approximately 80 Native people.

(2) Forum on Cultural Equity: Facing The Future With Imagination

On June 9 - 11, 1993, Native Women in the Arts assisted the Toronto Arts Council in organizing a forum on cultural equity: inter-connection, survival and collective growth.

(3) Nurturing Our Creative Vision

On June 12 & 13, 1993, Native Women in the Arts held a 2-day forum for Native women at the First Nations House, University of Toronto. For the first time, many Native women artists gathered to discuss their needs, barriers and resources. This was the first circle for Native women artists on community, cultural and artistic development.

(4) A Celebration of Native Women's Creative Expression

As part of the forum, an evening of Native women's talent was held at The Euclid Theatre in Toronto. This memorable event sold out with media coverage from CITY-TV and several radio interviews about the forum and the notable lineup of Native women artists. Women such as Shirley Bear, Beth Brant, Pura Fe & Soni, Chrystos, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, and Lee Maracle among others shared their stories, songs, poetry, performances, novels, etc. with an enthusiastic audience. This initial gathering plus a cabaret at The Euclid Theatre was a historical event in the history of Native women in Canada.

(5) Singing Workshops

In May 1993, Native Women in the Arts organized two singing workshops for the Anishnawbe Quek Singers and other interested women at The Native Canadian Centre. On two occasions, singing workshops were facilitated by traditional Seneca singer Sadie Buck, and traditional / contemporary singer Pura Fe of the Tuscarora Nation.

**(6) Native Sisterhood at Prison for Women
& Anishnawbe Quek Singers**

Through Native Women in the Arts, the Anishnawbe Quek Singers joined the Native Sisterhood for a pow-wow in May 1993.

The Anishnawbe Quek Singers, a circle of diverse Native women, were honoured to sit at the Drum with the Native Sisterhood. A tremendous resource for song learning and sharing exists with the Drum Committee at the Kingston Prison for Women.

(7) Youth Circle, Feast & Celebration

In September 1993, Native Women in the Arts organized a Talking Circle, Feast and Evening of Performance by Native and Black youth from Manitoulin, Ottawa, Windsor, Toronto and Six Nations areas involved in Fresh Elements.

**(8) Creative Writing Workshops with Native Sisterhood
in Prison for Women**

On November 6, 1993, a small team of local Native women writers visited the Native Sisterhood in the federal penitentiary. In response, to the request of the Sisterhood, a writing workshop was facilitated by well-known Mohawk writer Beth Brant. There are very few forms of creative self-expression allowed in prison. Creative writing offers these women a necessary creative process that is possible to them within the confinement of prison.

**(9) Creative Administrative Development & Strategic Planning
Based on Aboriginal Models**

On February 21, 22 and 23, 1994, a workshop entitled "Creative Administrative Development & Strategic Planning Based on Aboriginal Models" with facilitator Doreen Jensen was held at the Ontario Crafts Council in Toronto.

In this exciting workshop, 16 Aboriginal women leaders from the Native cultural and artistic organizations of Metro Toronto, Six Nations, Cape Croker and the Hamilton area came together to explore different or alternative infrastructures based on Aboriginal models. Our notions of leadership, work ethics, power and decision-making processes were discussed. Native Women in the Arts aims to foster a healthy network of Native cultural/artistic/women's organizations working together, to share resources, to brainstorm for future community programming, and generally, for the betterment of the Native community.

(10) An Evening With Traditional Gitksan Artist, Doreen Jensen

At the Native Canadian Centre, an evening with Doreen Jensen was open to the public on Tuesday, February 22, 1994. Jensen presented a slide show and discussed her creative journey as a Native women artist. Her contemporary art practice includes performance art, sculpture, dance, songs, writing and fabric art. She also shared the culture of the Gitksan people from the West Coast.

(11) National Gathering of Native Women Artists

A 4-day National Gathering of Native women artists was held at the Maadookii Elder's Lodge at Cape Croker Reserve on May 5, 6, 7, & 8, 1994. For the first time, Native women artists of urban and reservation/rural communities had the opportunity to share, create and explore artistic exchanges. Working groups and seasoned resource people provided mutual support, shared experiences and information, and discussed innovative ideas of cross-discipline sharing, and possible collective creations. In this way, women can uncover their histories and connections that are integral to the vision of Native Women in the Arts.

(12) Alternative Arts Award

In September 1994, Native Women in the Arts was awarded an "Alternative Arts Award" in recognition of an outstanding contribution to Toronto's Arts Community in the field of Arts Administration by The Toronto School of Art.

(13) Native Womens' Art Journal : "in a vast dreaming" - Premiere Issue

In January 1995, we published the premiere issue of an arts journal entitled "in a vast dreaming". In this first issue, the lives and creativity of 46 Aboriginal women are reflected in their short stories, poetry, excerpts of plays, biographies, songs and visual art work. There were over 100 responses to this call for submissions from Native women across Canada. The second issue of our annual arts journal will be published in January 1996.

"in a vast dreaming" has reached artists, bookstores, community centres, artist-run centres, libraries, schools, and mainstream cultural agencies and organizations in urban and rural/reservation communities across Canada.

(14) Spinning Tales I

In partnership with the University of Toronto's Women's Centre, Native Women in the Arts held a writing workshop for Native women writers entitled "Spinning Tales I". This workshop was conducted by Beatrice Culletin-Moisitioner (In Search of April Raintree, Night of the Trickster) on January 26, 1995 held at The Native Canadian Centre.

(15) Spinning Tales II

In partnership with the University of Toronto's Women's Centre and Native Women's Resource Centre, a second writing workshop was facilitated by Beth Brant (Mohawk Trail, Food & Spirits, Testimony From the Faithful, Writing As Witness) on April 19, 1995 at the Native Women's Resource Centre.

(16) Launch of Premiere Issue

On April 18, 1995 a launch for our premiere issue was held at the Native Canadian Centre. This successful evening included readings and slide shows from six women who contributed to the journal.

(17) Steering Committee for 7th Generation Books

In May and June 1995, *Native Women in the Arts* is part of a Steering Committee to found 7th Generation Books, the only existing Aboriginal publishing business in Ontario

(18) Native Women Artists Resource Library

An ongoing project is to acquire resources such as: books, magazines, newspapers, videos, scripts, slides, etc. in order to build an accessible library, and to record our creative work as Native women artists.