

## The huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum: Strong in Spirit and Strong of Heart

First unveiled to the community at the Nuu-chah-nulth Fishing Rights Celebration in November 2014, the huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum (HuupuK<sup>w</sup>anum), an exquisitely-crafted glass and wood box, was designed by artist Kelly Foxcroft-Poirier on the direction of the Ha'wiih.

"It contains everything the Ha'wiih need to manage their resources," said Foxcroft-Poirier, adding that this particular huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum represents the chiefly holdings of all Nuu-chah-nulth Ha'wiih.



Maquinna (Lewis George) with Casiits (Stanley Sam) while he speaks about the huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum. Kelly Foxcroft-Poirier the artist (right).

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She said it was Casiits (Stanley Sam) who stressed the importance of the Council of Ha'wiih Forum on Fisheries having a huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum.

"It was really important to him that the Ha'wiih act in governance rooted in the fullness of the teachings and traditions, and not just as a Council of Ha'wiih Forum on Fisheries in name."

The idea for a collective Nuu-chah-nulth huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum originated four years ago when the Ha'wiih gathered for a special workshop focused on governance. While listening to discussions on how to better incorporate traditional governance into decision making Foxcroft-Poirier created a sketch that illustrated the wisdom, thoughts and strengths being shared. The image showed a huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum in the centre. At the same workshop Casiits (Stanley Sam) presented his own painting showing governance and spoke about how the power of the ha'wiih and our governance comes from the huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum and that it is stronger than Canada's constitution.

Not long after, Foxcroft-Poirier had the opportunity to work with Tim Paul, renowned Nuu-chah-nulth artist from Esperanza Inlet along with Rod Sayers, Tom Paul, Pay Amos and Jake Gallic to create a 24-foot tall glass and red cedar tower called "huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum" that represented the wealth of Nuu-chah-nulth Nations on both land and sea.

"I learned so much during that time about the strength of our artists and our traditions," said Foxcroft-Poirier who grew up on Tseshaht territory and attended Haa-huu-payak School. It was this experience, she said, combined with a dream she had that convinced her to use glass for the piece.

Shortly after, she met with the Implementation Committee to discuss creating a huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum to reinforce traditional governance, values and teachings at the Council of Ha'wiih Forum on Fisheries and other important

gatherings, and to remind everyone of the inherent power at the "centre." They decided on a name, which means strong of heart and strong of spirit.

After obtaining an artist grant from the First Peoples Cultural Council, Foxcroft-Poirier asked her mom, aunts, gramma and uncle to stand with her and pronounce in a culturally appropriate way and in the Nuu-chah-nulth language that designing the piece was an honour that she would accept. In the months that followed, she sought guidance from the ha'wiih, elders, artists, and her elders from the Implementation Committee.

"I was welcomed into homes, fed and given teachings," she said. "Ideas and thoughts were shared with me so thoughtfully and generously."

In January 2015, at the Council of Ha'wiih Forum on Fisheries in Hitacu, the huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum was placed in the centre of the room for the first time surrounded by Chiefs from most of the 14 Nuu-chah-nulth Nations. Yuuʔuʔiʔath Art Williams unveiled the huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum and Wickanninish (Cliff Atleo) spoke about how the authority of the Ha'wiih is through the huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum.

"The huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum holds our history, songs, dances, regalia, curtain, the fishing rights court case and our protocols," he said. "It was created for this table and will be a reminder to us about the authority of our Ha'wiih."

C. Anne Robinson, Tseshaht, who ensured that protocol was respected during and after the work's creation, would agree.

"It is a living entity that holds all the belonging of the Ha'wiih including fisheries," she said. "Having it in the centre during meetings is necessary to assert our government, to anchor the discussion, keep the focus, maintain balance, and to remind us that everything lives and is connected."

In the Nuu-chah-nulth language huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum (HuupuK<sup>w</sup>anum) is defined as an ornate box that symbolically holds the possessions of a Ha'wiih. Historical records show a long tradition of different kinds of boxes used for cooking, storage and chief's chests for storing valuables, such as blankets, masks, and dance whistles. Yet unlike past treasure chests where possessions were hidden from view, this huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum is see-through revealing the treasures kept inside.

Foxcroft-Poirier said the purpose of the piece was to light the way forward while remembering the teachings of the ancestors.

"We are doing this for our children to move forward in light, strong in spirit and strong of heart."

*Our vision is to manage Nuu-chah-nulth ha-ha-houlthee of our Ha'wiih in a sustainable way for our muschim, consistent with Nuu-chah-nulth knowledge and values. This is a responsibility given by Naas. Our aquatic resources must fulfill our sustenance, ceremonial and societal needs, and provide an economic base for healthy communities.*

—Nuu-chah-nulth Ha'wiih, Council of Ha'wiih Forum on Fisheries



Nuu-chah-nulth Ha'wiih accepting the huupuk<sup>w</sup>anum created for them by artist Kelly Foxcroft-Poirier.