

Shy Watters to exhibit in New York at American Museum of Natural History

Shishalh Shy Watters Cedar Hat Weaver has been invited to display her art at a new exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The museum, the largest natural history museum in the world, is creating news displays of historic northwest coast artifacts, set to open this fall.

“When I saw the email I thought it was a scam,” Shy laughed. “I had to research it and then I wondered how I had been selected.” Turns out, her social media sites have garnered a lot of attention of other artists such as Coast Salish artist Louie Gong, who’s work focuses on Indigenous and multi-racial identity. He is another of the seven artists invited to display at the American Museum of Natural History.

In extending an invitation to display the museum’s vice president of exhibitions wrote, “I’m writing to you because we are all great admirers of your work. ... we would like to purchase and display one of your pieces.”

When Shy had a Zoom call with the museum, she was informed that other artists were following her work, without her knowledge. “I was so shocked,” Shy said.

Specifically, the museum requested a cedar graduation hat. “We don’t see graduation caps like these on the East Coast, and they show your skill an innovation as a weaver. They also tie to a story about how many Native high school graduates in parts of the United States aren’t allowed to wear anything to their graduation that makes their Native culture visible—so they seem especially meaningful,” wrote Lauri Halderman,

Shy said the information about the east coast hit home as she has roots on her father’s side, from Cape Cod, and is a direct descendant

from the Pilgrims who came from England on the Mayflower in 1620. She would love to travel to New York city for the exhibit, but COVID-19 travel restrictions and or protocols for quarantining might make that trip impossible. If she can go, she will travel a bit further east, to Cape Cod, Massachusetts. The museum is currently offering programming and exhibits on-line and Shy said the opening for this exhibit will also be done virtually.



The new gallery will showcase art from the north west coast and tell the stories of the art and the artists who create it.

Shy was interested in weaving and sought out knowledge keeper Fran Nahanee, who shared with Shy about how to culturally modify cedar tree’s and weave cedar hats, Fran lent a hat mold to Shy and that got her started. Shy is mainly a self taught weaver and her designs are unique and one of a kind.

Shy started to share her passion for cedar weaving through workshops throughout the province. Last year, due to COVID, her workshops moved on-line, and she now teaches via Zoom.

Her business is booming, and Shy’s artwork has been shipped around the world. Last year she sent three hats to England and 10 to Germany. “It’s no longer a small business,” she laughed.

Being asked to exhibit in a preeminent institution is an honour for Shy. Her weaving will sit alongside artwork of very prominent artists, and Shy said it seems somewhat surreal. “That’s me!” she laughed.

Besides being an artist, Shy is also a member of the shishalh Nation staff, working as the Strengthening Families Worker in the Community Services Division.

Congratulations Shy!